



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Agrifood and Agribusiness

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Chair: All right. I'll call this meeting to order. Good evening, everyone. I'd like to welcome all members, staff, and guests to the meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I'd like to recognize that this meeting is commencing on the traditional land of Treaty 6 people.

My name is Graham Sucha. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and the chair of this committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then we'll introduce any members who may be on the phone. I will start with the member to my right.

Mr. van Dijken: Good evening. Glenn van Dijken, deputy chair of the committee, MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Schneider: Dave Schneider, Little Bow.

Mr. Taylor: Wes Taylor, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Piquette: Colin Piquette, MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Carson: Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Coolahan: Craig Coolahan, the MLA for Calgary-Klein.

Ms McPherson: Hello. Karen McPherson, MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mrs. Schreiner: Good evening. Kim Schreiner, MLA for Red Deer-North.

Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Maria Fitzpatrick, MLA, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Dach: Good evening. Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung.

Dr. Amato: Good evening. Sarah Amato, research officer.

Dr. Massolin: Good evening. Philip Massolin, manager of research and committee services.

Mr. Koenig: Hello. I'm Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Mr. Roth: Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

Mr. Orr: Ron Orr, MLA, Lacombe-Ponoka. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. As per usual, before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. The microphone console is operated by *Hansard* staff. Please ensure all cellphones are on silent mode. Audio of the committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by Alberta *Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

Now we'll move on to approval of the agenda. Would a member like to move the approval of the agenda today? Moved by MLA Fitzpatrick that the March 15, 2017, meeting agenda of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be adopted as circulated.

All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

All right. Inquiring into growing Alberta's agrifood and agribusiness sector, section (a), deliberations, recommendations. Hon. members, before we continue our deliberations, there was an agreement amongst members for research services to look into the existence of a made-in-Alberta designation.

I would like to ask Dr. Amato to please provide information on what she found.

Dr. Amato: Good evening. I would be pleased to do so. Let me first report that a single made-in-Alberta designation for agrifood and agribusiness products does not appear to exist, and I took a variety of search techniques to find this information. I did a basic Google search. I looked on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. I also had a very interesting conversation with some officials from Agriculture and Forestry, which I will report on, and I also found some information for the reference of the committee on geographical indication, which might be useful for the discussion that follows.

Let me just say that in terms of my discussion with Agriculture and Forestry, they let me know, which is also sort of basically verifiable in some ways by a Google search, that there have been many attempts at labelling products as made in Alberta. In fact, if you do a Google search, you'll notice, for example, that there is a label for Buy Alberta food, which is a collaboration between the Alberta Food Processors and Safeway Canada. It seems that there are several such collaborators and that they are divided between different industries and different major retailers. For example, Safeway has one, Save-On has one, Sobeys has one, as does Co-op. They all have different kinds of slogans.

Part of the challenge is having different industries and retailers work together on this. In general the ministry, thus far at least, has stayed away from certification, although historically, going back 20 or 30 years, at least according to my source, there have been some efforts towards a kind of general made-in-Alberta certification or brand depending on how you're defining that. The official that I spoke to said that there are sort of three guiding questions that might drive such a project, the first being: what is it that the brand or certification is looking to promote? Is it telling consumers where a product comes from and that therefore they should buy it? The big question, then, is: how will this increase the bottom line of the processor or the producer?

I also thought, given the discussion that was going on last night, that it may be useful to provide the committee with some information on what is called a geographic indication because it seemed that what the committee was in fact discussing was the need for a made-in-Alberta geographic indication. So what is a geographic indication? According to the World Intellectual Property Organization:

A geographical indication . . . is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. In order to function as a [geographic indication], a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place. In addition, the qualities, characteristics or reputation of the product should be essentially due to the place of origin.

The difference between, for example, a geographic indication and a trademark is that a geographical indication identifies a good as originating from a very particular place while a trademark identifies a good or service as originating from a particular company. Examples of a geographic indication, if you need to think

about it, are Darjeeling tea, champagne, roquefort cheese, which are indelibly associated with a particular place.

In summation, what I found is that there is no single made-in-Alberta designation, which I think the committee actually knew before when they sort of asked the question, and that some information on geographic indication may be useful as the committee goes forward with its deliberations.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll open it up to any questions for Dr. Amato.

All right. Seeing none, members, the committee will continue deliberations regarding its inquiry into growing and diversifying Alberta's agrifood and agribusiness sector. I would like to remind the committee that members can discuss a particular related issue prior to moving a motion. This might be one way to flesh out ideas and topics the committee would like to see in its report to the Legislature before engaging in the formal process of moving motions. Or, as was done in last night's meeting, members may wish to put forward wording before moving a motion so that the committee may contribute to a suitable wording. May I suggest that when we're moving a motion, members read slowly just so committee staff and *Hansard* will be able to record it.

Are there any members wishing to bring forward a topic for the committee's consideration? MLA Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I'd like to thank Dr. Amato for your presentation. I appreciate that.

I've had the opportunity today to look over point 4, and if it's the will of the committee, I have a motion that's maybe a little bit more to the point. I think that it addresses expanding and promoting Alberta's agri-industry and promoting Alberta brand names. I think I'd like to now read some of the wording if that's okay.

The Chair: Yeah. Some of the wording you're thinking of. Okay.

Mrs. Schreiner: I thought we could talk about recommending to the government that we build on or expand the explore local initiative to include a made-in-Alberta brand to assist in expanding and promoting local market demand for local products as well as creating a recognizable brand that signifies sustainable, responsible, and quality food products. I'd just like to hear what maybe the others have to say about that.

6:40

The Chair: I'll open it up to the floor for discussion.

Mr. Orr: A question, please. Can you just explain to me what the origin of explore local is and how broad it is into the actual Alberta marketplace? Is it recognizable? Just give me a little background on that, please.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. I can answer that a little bit. I think the explore local program is on the agric.gov.ab.ca website already. It just provides support to Alberta's local food producers and processors who market their products directly to consumers. I think that would be a lot of people in farmers' markets. I assume that by now it's already in supermarkets but even expanding to large supermarkets, things like that. It's just trying to improve that program that already exists. There's no real reason to reinvent the wheel, I don't think.

Mr. Orr: Well, I agree with you there. Yeah. That's probably a good – that's why I wanted a little more. I think it's got potential. So . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: A further comment if I can, before I get too tired and I zone out on you all. This – and I agree with this – targets Alberta. Should we be including something on what we talked about last night, too, with the sort of international markets? Maybe it should be a separate motion. I'm just throwing it out there that we were talking at one point in time about the Alberta-Canada brand value as well. It's probably too much to deal with in this motion, but we probably shouldn't forget that either.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you for that, Mr. Orr. I think it would move into that direction if we started out with this.

Mr. Orr: I like the nice, tight focus of this. It has a targeted focus, which is good.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I guess my question is very similar. Explore local, when I do a quick search on it, is not just an Alberta initiative by the looks of it. We do have it on our Agriculture and Forestry website. It looks like we have some initiative moving forward on that already, and the intent of this would be to build a made-in-Alberta brand, essentially, for that explore local initiative. Okay.

Mrs. Schreiner: To explore and expand. You're right. Promote.

The Chair: Any further discussion?

Seeing none, did you want to move the motion, MLA Schreiner?

Mrs. Schreiner: Sure. I'd love to. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. I'll open up the motion for discussion. Just for the record, I'll allow Mr. Roth to read it into the record as well.

Mr. Roth: Moved by Mrs. Schreiner that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government expand the explore local initiative to include a made-in-Alberta brand to assist in expanding and promoting local market demand for local products as well as creating a recognizable brand that signifies sustainable, responsible, and quality food products.

Mr. Orr: Just a question. With the last two lines are we, in essence, asking for a certification? How do we define those qualities, and who defines them?

Connolly: I believe that by creating a certain brand, you would have to make sure that people are up to a certain code so that they can actually have that, not a certification, but if it's a brand, then you don't want to just put everything that's made in Alberta, possibly, under that umbrella. So I believe that that would eventually, possibly, have a certification program within it.

Mr. Orr: You eventually end up there.

Connolly: Yeah. Well, if we're maintaining that it's a sustainable, responsible, and a quality product, then we don't want to have things that aren't a quality product that say "made in Alberta" because then it doesn't really benefit us.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Just for some clarity here, once we get into certification, that requires a certain amount of policing efforts to ensure that people using the made-in-Alberta brand are living up to the standards that have been developed. I guess my question would

be: where do we see that aspect of whose responsibility that would entail? Would that be at the industry level or the government level? Has this been done in other jurisdictions, and where does that lie?

Mr. Coolahan: Well, we did have a bit of discussion on this last night if I remember correctly, and I think part of the issue, as we're sort of walking around here right now, is the made-in-Alberta. What does that mean? If you used B.C. wood to make a product here, does that become made in Alberta? Does there need to be a standard? I know we discussed that there were issues with the cattle industry because they move all over the place and so many different things happen in different places. With other products do we see that same challenge?

Mr. van Dijken: I guess going further on that, last night in our motion that we worked with in regard to a certification program for Alberta beef, we recommended that the government work with industry and related stakeholders to develop a certification program for Alberta beef. The concern I have with the way we've worded it here is that a program that is existing within our minister's department is expanding with no challenge to industry and stakeholders to be part of the development of this and possibly part of the administration of this type of a process. I hesitate to support the motion based on that we are put into a situation where the ministry is kind of being identified as the driver of this entirely.

Mr. Drysdale: I just want to make it clear that this is totally separate from the certification of beef. Certification is one thing that is pretty strict, CSA, whereas this is just a branding or a registration. As long as we keep the certification for beef, I'm okay with this, but they are two separate things, as far as I'm concerned.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. We already passed that motion, so this will be a different one.

However, the explore local program already is a multidisciplinary team focused on connecting people and business through information, learning opportunities, coaching, mentoring, advocacy, et cetera, et cetera. It already does work quite a bit with business. However, if you wanted to throw in something that directly says to work with stakeholders or industry or what have you, I might be open to that.

Mr. Orr: I'd actually back up what you just said in the sense that it is sort of multidisciplinary. I mean, I'm just looking here at the links, and they've got a whole bunch of farm associations and different marketing associations. I mean, there are partners in this; it isn't purely government. So I don't know that it's that big of an issue, really. At least to me it's not.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to the motion? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

Mr. Roth, can you read it into the record again?

6:50

Mr. Roth: Moved by Mrs. Schreiner that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government expand the explore local initiative to include a made-in-Alberta brand to assist in expanding and promoting local market demand for local products as well as creating a recognizable brand that signifies sustainable, responsible, and quality food products.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

We're back on deliberations. Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. You know, I suggest that we craft a motion, like you said from the beginning, rather than put a motion out there and subtract and add with amendments, which tends to lengthen things out.

I was going through those things in the House this morning. I don't know what else I was supposed to be doing. I was going through the submissions. Sorry; that was a joke. What I recall when we had all the submitters here was that a lot of guys talked about competitiveness. Certainly the cattle guys, Calgary economic, city of Lethbridge economic and such, Alberta Food Processors: they made it pretty clear that some of the regulatory – well, I shouldn't say that – policy, possibly, is making their businesses noncompetitive on the world market. Look, I'm going to read out something just to start to craft a motion. We can start on it and go with discussion. Is that fair?

The Chair: Yeah. So just throw some words out there to start.

Mr. Schneider: Recommend that any new government regulations that impact the agrifood or agribusiness sectors should only be introduced with a strategy to mitigate any negative impacts on the competitiveness of the agri-industry.

I mean, I can read off this stuff, but it's all available, and everybody has had a chance to look at it as well. It was something that was brought up quite a bit.

Mr. Coolahan: So we're just playing with this, right?

The Chair: Yes. We'll start with Mr. Dach and then Mr. Coolahan.

Mr. Dach: I'm agnostic towards the motion at this point, but just in the interest of verbiage you could simply say that the initiatives introduced should not reduce competitiveness, so fewer words saying the same thing, I think, or something along those lines, that the impact on the agrifood or agribusiness sector should not reduce the competitiveness of the agri-industry.

The Chair: Member Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. I think this is a good start. I'd like to put a bit more of a positive spin on it, perhaps more directly related to this topic.

When you look at the submissions, the issues, almost one page is provincial policies, right? Yeah. I was looking at something to the effect that it would really focus on the provincial, interprovincial, national, and international standards. So I'd like to get something in there – I'm just going to talk out loud for a bit – to recommend that the government examine inconsistencies between provincially and federally inspected food products and explore strategies to expand interprovincial trade.

I guess I find that wording a bit negative almost. I just want it to be positive, like, this is what we're going to do moving forward, not what we're not going to do.

Mr. Dach: I would say that's good directional drilling.

Mr. Coolahan: We'll frack this still. It's okay.

Mr. Schneider: Sorry. It was just general. I didn't have a topic. I mean, I didn't have one of the numbers. Sorry. Like I said, I was sitting there going through the submissions, and I went backwards from Thursday's to Wednesday's.

I don't know. Does that change the intent?

The Chair: It's really to what your will is because we are still wordsmithing. If you're looking to move a motion, it's to your will, Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Coolahan: Would it be okay if I read out something so that we could just view them together?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Coolahan: I will go: that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government examine inconsistencies between provincially and federally inspected food products and explore strategies to expand interprovincial trade.

The Chair: Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. I just wondered if it's a different motion. It doesn't really reflect the same . . .

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. I'm working on – sorry, Chair. Through the chair, I thought we were on number 6, the regulatory standards.

Mr. Schneider: Okay. Well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Chair. Through the chair, why don't we work on yours and leave mine over there. Is that okay?

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. Absolutely.

Mr. Schneider: I think that it's two different things. I really do.

Mr. Coolahan: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought we were on the same one. Okay. Maybe we weren't. Well, I saw regulations, so I thought you were talking about the regulations.

The Chair: All right. Why don't we move back to what Mr. Schneider was discussing before, and then we can move on to Mr. Coolahan's after.

Mr. Schneider: I'm open to any suggestions, and if you're happy with it, I'll make it a motion. I'm not on any particular number. It was just something that seemed to be a consistent discussion over the two days, so I thought I would propose that we craft something to reflect that discussion.

The Chair: I'll open it up to any discussion in relation to this.

Mr. Dach: Forgive me if I'm wrong, but I thought we were kind of following the 11 recommendations and so forth and addressing those.

The Chair: We have been going to different areas from time to time.

Mr. Gotfried: You know what? I really like this one because we did hear about competitiveness at the time from almost every different sector. The only thing – and this is probably a bit of a wordsmithing point – is that instead of “should not reduce,” maybe we should say that it should enhance the competitiveness. I'd rather see that what we do as legislators is actually going to enhance competitiveness as we go forward, so just to be positive and approach it from a positive side of trying to do things better. We can be positive, you know, on the plus side.

7:00

The Chair: Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Just give me a minute.

The Chair: Any other members?

Mr. Orr: I would say that we should make it a little bit more broad. Why does it need to be limited to just new regulations? Well, I don't know.

The Chair: Mr. Schneider, do you care to move the motion?

Mr. Schneider: If everybody has had a run at it, I'm more than prepared to.

The Chair: So you're formally moving it?

Mr. Schneider: Sure.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Coolahan: I don't think any government goes into making a regulation that's going to negatively impact these. I mean, of course we have unintended consequences. Things happen like this. We understand that. I'm asking if this is necessary as a motion to present to government. I think this is understood almost.

Mr. Carson: It's also a great subjective.

Mr. Coolahan: It is subjective, yeah. That is a good point.

Mr. Gotfried: I hear what you're saying, Member Coolahan. But I think this is a positive for us just to have. You know, we're messengers of what we heard, I think. We heard this a lot, their concern about competitiveness. We have a temporary advantage, maybe longer than temporary, in the currency exchange rates, which has given Canadian or Alberta products an enhanced competitiveness today, but if we were to be on par with the U.S. dollar, we'd be in big trouble, I would suggest.

I think this is really positive in that it focuses on competitiveness, you know, across the board. I would hope that with this we'd go back and look at existing regulations, but at least this protects going forward. What we're recommending, from what we're hearing here, from the people that presented to us, is that competitiveness and unexpected changes which affect our competitiveness are really a big challenge and a big risk for them.

Mr. Carson: I just want to agree with my colleague here in terms of it being subjective. I mean, my concern is that we could look at a policy like carbon pricing. One side can say, “Well, that's completely negative in terms of the impact it will have on the industry,” but we could argue that the funds that we take from it are able to be reinvested into those industries through, you know, reducing use of electricity and so forth. That's my only concern.

I'm not sure how I sit on this so far. Once again, the fact that this is the mandate of the ministry in the first place: we'd never want to negatively impact an industry. That's where I sit.

Mr. Gotfried: Member Carson, I sort of understand completely what you're saying on that. However, the incumbency is that if we're introducing one thing that we find – I mean, let's use the carbon levy as an example. The intent, then, is to find countervailing ways to not make them uncompetitive. There's not an inconsistency there because, I would again suggest, the intent is to do that and then, if we don't do that, to ensure that there's an opportunity for that competitiveness to remain. Then we hold ourselves accountable to that.

Mr. Schneider: You know what? I'll just make it a motion.

The Chair: So you're officially moving that as a motion?

Mr. Schneider: Yeah.

An Hon. Member: I'll second it.

The Chair: Mr. Roth, can you read it in for the record?

Mr. Roth: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Moved by Mr. Schneider that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend to the government that any new regulations that impact the agrifood or agribusiness sectors should enhance the competitiveness of agrifood and agribusiness industries.

The Chair: I'll open that up for discussion. Mr. Orr, were you still wanting to speak?

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I do agree that it is kind of the mandate of the ministry. I think for us to affirm that for them is positive, and I think it fairly represents a lot of people that expressed their opinions about that although I fully recognize that there are lots of definitions of what different ones meant by competitiveness, so we probably shouldn't define it. I still think, actually, now that I've looked at it more, that we should remove the two words "any new" because it makes it too restrictive. Just leave it at regulations, and let the government work without being shackled in that way.

It's not about trying to control anything that's new. It's just about affirming the importance to the speakers that came to us of competitiveness. I think one of them said that that's the single most important issue for them, anyway, so I think it's fair for us to represent to the government that that should be at least a theme, something on their radar screen, but I don't think we need to limit it to any new. I'd be prepared to move that we actually remove the words "any new" and just recommend to the government that regulations that impact the food should enhance the competitiveness.

The Chair: I just want to confirm that you're moving an amendment to strike out "any new."

Mr. Orr: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay.
Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. Actually I have some reservations about opening it up that broadly because, I mean, that would seem that that would have global import. I guess there are differences in how you define competitiveness. You know, as I've been trying to push through this committee, I think the real work for us is to be able to direct our agribusiness sector as much as possible where we're not being locked into situations where it's a race to the bottom – right? – where we're running a low-margin business and that's kind of the emphasis. I mean, it seems that you really open yourself up to having your own margin reduced to the point where it's difficult for our producers to make a profit, which is a challenge that we've been facing. I'm not sure about the framing of that because I think it might lose the idea of being an ethical producer, being a responsible producer, what Mr. Drysdale was talking about, guaranteeing that we have the best quality. In that type of sense, regulations and laws actually can assist the competitiveness. I think the way that it's being framed is this idea that somehow more regulations put on an industry automatically make it less competitive. That's not something that I agree with.

Then the other real concern would be: are we really wanting to make that statement? There are always other social objectives we need to balance things against, so where are we going to go with this? Does that mean that we're going to be looking at child labour

legislation, let's say, or, you know, are we talking about watering down even existing standards to make it more competitive in sort of this commodity race to the bottom in particular sectors? We have to, of course, keep our existing businesses going, but, I mean, my understanding of the core of the idea behind what we're trying to do here is that we're trying to get beyond. We're looking at value-added. We're trying to get it to kind of go up the value chain, and that's where I'd prefer to see the emphasis for the committee. I'm not sure if it could be amended in a way that wouldn't leave it that open or give that connotation, or maybe we're just not going to have agreement on this. I don't know.

The Chair: Right now the discussion would be on "any new." We'd have to vote on that before we could move any other amendments.

Mr. Piquette: Right. Okay.

Mr. Taylor: I like the way that Mr. Orr has phrased it in taking out the "any new." It does leave us kind of open, and it allows us to go forward. One of the things I heard is that they want to be able to make money. I mean, at the end of the day, the producers need to make money in order to survive. If we're going to keep the agribusinesses open and they can't make a profit, they're going to shut down, and we won't have a market. I think the way this is worded is actually very good. Every time you do something that impacts it, there should be a counterbalance to everything.

7:10

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.
Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. I did think I wanted to bring something to the committee's attention we haven't really addressed yet, and that is to make sure that government is not bound to break any possible trade agreements that they might be in already. For example, we've just entered into CETA, and agricultural product trade is certainly part of that. I think we should make sure that we add the words "where possible" or something to the expectation that we're not restricted by binding trade agreements.

The Chair: Mr. Dach, we have to speak to the amendment at hand. Any additional amendments you'd have to speak to . . .

Mr. Dach: I can move that subamendment, then, please, by adding after the word "that" the words "where not restricted," or simply put "where possible" or "legally possible."

The Chair: So "that" . . .

Mr. Dach: After the word "that" put "where legally possible."

The Chair: So you want to substitute "where possible."

Mr. Dach: Basically after the word "that" add in "where legally possible." Just say "where possible." Put a comma after "that" and add the words "where possible," comma. That's it. I'm just adding. I'm not substituting.

The Chair: Well, it would substitute it.

Mr. Dach: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. Mr. Dach, I'm not sure where you were talking about government regulations and whatnot. I'm assuming

that no government is going to try and put in regulations that are not consistent with provincial or federal statutes already in place. I guess, maybe, is this redundant?

Mr. Dach: There may be other encumbrances that we are not thinking about right now beyond trade agreements that would prohibit the implementation of a certain strategy which may otherwise enhance competitiveness. If there are some measures the government feels necessary to implement that some may interpret as an uncompetitive thing, you want this committee to be recommending to the government that they can't do that. You don't want to tie their hands necessarily. There may be situations where they're bound by international agreements or other covenants that prevent them from going ahead or prevent them from not taking a step, which might be deemed by others to be uncompetitive.

The Chair: Mr. Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. Okay. I like the spirit of this motion. I'm not going to make any suggested changes. I'd just like to speak to it right now if that's okay.

The Chair: Right now we're on the subamendment, so you need to speak to the subamendment.

Mr. Coolahan: I have to speak to the subamendment?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Coolahan: Aw. Lorne.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm trying to seek clarity here, I guess, Mr. Dach. If I were to rephrase this and say "consistent with federal and provincial laws," is that what you're trying to get at?

Mr. Dach: Not necessarily only laws. I'm not thinking of exact scenarios, but there may be a situation where a government will implement a measure that some will consider uncompetitive to the industry, but it's a measure that is deemed by the government in the public interest to go ahead on. There may be competing purposes. I can't think of a specific example right now, but I just don't want to limit the option for the government to implement a measure that may, perhaps, be affecting one industry to benefit another industry so it's uncompetitive to one but not in another. You'd want to leave the option open, I think, to allow a measure that might be deemed uncompetitive in certain circumstances.

Mr. Gotfried: I don't have a problem with the spirit of where you're coming from. It's just that I'm seeking clarity, I guess. "Where possible" is pretty broad, and I'm not sure what it really means.

The Chair: As a reminder, through the chair, please.
Member Connolly.

Connolly: Well, thank you. I just want to kind of build on what Member Piquette was saying a little while ago. There are certain regulations that are for public safety, not just for the public in Alberta but across the world. It doesn't enhance competitiveness across the board when you put in safety regulations. Sometimes it can, but it can be easily argued that it doesn't increase competitiveness across the country or across the world. You're able to throw out a lot more goods from areas with fewer regulations such as India or Bangladesh because they have fewer regulations as opposed to us. I agree that we do need certain regulations for public safety and for labour laws, et cetera, et cetera. However, I have to

agree with Mr. Dach that adding in "where possible" is very important.

Mr. Taylor: I was just, actually, looking for a little bit of clarity. I'm not a hundred per cent sure where you wanted to put "where possible."

Connolly: Where "any new" is.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. That's all that is. I just wanted to make sure. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I actually agree with some of Member Connolly's comments. I think what he's saying reflects the reality that we don't ever legislate or even regulate in a vacuum. I think that's all this is trying to say, that there may be other impacts. I guess all I'm saying on the subamendment to my amendment is that I don't have a problem with it. I think it's fine.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm still trying to seek some clarity here. I guess I would say that anything is possible, but not everything is practical. Really, anything is possible. You have to make choices around it. I do agree very much with what Member Connolly was saying because competitiveness is not always about price.

Mr. Orr: Exactly.

Mr. Gotfried: Sometimes it's about quality. We were talking about certification. Well, there may be a cost to certification. You know, everybody may have to pay a certain amount per head of cattle or bushel of wheat or whatever it is, but that might actually enhance our competitiveness by giving a higher quality perception of our product. I don't think that those are inconsistent. But I really worry about the word "possible" because if you really start thinking about it – and I don't want to be a dictionary or a thesaurus here – anything is possible but not necessarily practical.

The Chair: Member Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thanks, Chair. Okay. I am speaking to the subamendment. "Where possible," I think, gets us closer, but I do appreciate Mr. Gotfried's position on that as well. Actually, what I was going to speak to prior was a lot of what Member Connolly said. You know, regulations, good or bad: it's subjective whether they enhance the industry or not. Sometimes if there's labour legislation that you might think does detract from competitiveness, well, again, that's subjective.

Can I suggest another subamendment, or do we have to deal with this one, too?

The Chair: We have to deal with this first.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. I'll leave it there. I have a different subamendment.

The Chair: Member Fitzpatrick.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. I think that you have to put "where possible" in because if not, any regulation that you put in has to enhance. If it's a regulation that's about food safety, it may not necessarily enhance it, but it has to go in. If you don't put "where possible" in, you are eliminating that.

7:20

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the subamendment. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. The subamendment is carried.

We are now back on the amendment. Any discussion on the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That amendment is carried.

We are back on the motion as amended. I'll open that up for discussion. MLA Fitzpatrick.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Could I suggest – it may kind of add to what you wanted to do – “strive to enhance”?

Mr. Gotfried: I'm pretty comfortable with just the way this is now. I think that “where possible” gives us a broader interpretation.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm still not a big fan of the word “possible,” but it's there, so I can live with it.

Mr. Coolahan: I agree with that attempt at a subamendment. I like that. It would be an amendment. My apologies. Sorry. Robert's rules.

I think it actually deals with the issue of what we were talking about, how regulations can subjectively appear to not enhance. What you want to do is strive to enhance the competitiveness with all your regulations.

The Chair: MLA Fitzpatrick, just for clarity, are you moving an amendment as well? Just because we heard the terms being thrown in there.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Well, I thought that it might kind of make it a little clearer.

The Chair: If you want to leave it for discussion purposes, that's fine. I just wanted to make sure you weren't moving it.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Just for discussion, yeah.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gotfried: It really worries me when I hear things like “where possible strive to.” It doesn't get a whole lot more diluted than that. I'm concerned that when we start layering on “where possible strive to,” it's kind of like: well, if you feel like it. That's just my impression. I'm not shooting down what you're saying. I think it's well intended, but when I hear those four words together, it starts to concern me.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. That's fine. I appreciate what you're saying, and I would argue, actually, that “should” does the same thing.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. But I think that this strengthens it even more.

Mr. Coolahan: I'm good with it.

The Chair: Okay. Any other speakers on the motion as amended? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

Mr. Roth, if you can read it in for the record.

Mr. Roth: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Moved by Mr. Schneider that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend to the government that, where possible, regulations

that impact the agrifood or agribusiness sectors should enhance the competitiveness of agrifood and agribusiness industries.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

We are back on deliberations. I'll open up the floor for discussion. Member Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. I've kind of been following in order here, but we are jumping around a bit, so I'd liked to focus a bit on 6, which was the regulatory standards and frameworks, and just quickly get back to what I was sort of talking about with Mr. Schneider around how a lot of the submissions had to do with provincial policies. I would like to actually just put forth a motion.

The Chair: Is this the earlier one that you made?

Mr. Coolahan: We could work with it, I guess.

The Chair: Yeah. If you want to work with what we had before.

Mr. Coolahan: We still have this?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Coolahan: Oh, look at that. That's great. Okay. This is what I'd like to work with. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Orr: You've got the federal and provincial. I wonder if we should include municipalities in there because that impacts some agriculture, particularly the urban stuff and the indoor stuff that they're trying to grow. I remember them talking about municipal regulations.

Mr. Coolahan: I would be okay with that. We can discuss it, but at first blush I don't see an issue with it.

The Chair: Putting “municipal” before “provincial.”

Mr. Koenig: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will admit I'm not an expert on food safety law, but I may just raise for the committee that I don't believe that municipalities are typically empowered to inspect food products. They may be empowered to inspect other sorts of food establishments potentially, but the inspection of food products, I believe, is done either provincially or federally, depending on if it's interprovincial trade or whether it's only within the province. I'll just put that out there for the committee.

The Chair: I'll continue any discussion on this matter.

Mr. Drysdale: You guys are sucking me in here. I'm usually not for wordsmithing. When you say “examining inconsistencies,” that really doesn't help it any. How about “removing inconsistencies”? I mean, looking at them doesn't help anything, but I'm not into wordsmithing.

Mr. Coolahan: I totally appreciate what you're saying. I mean, we can wordsmith it more. As a broad motion it's just saying that you have to examine, find them, and then you can get rid of them. If you don't know they're there, then you can't get rid of them, right?

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. I think also that by examining them, we'd also have to talk to other provinces if we're trying to increase interprovincial trade as well as working with the federal government to make sure that we don't have those inconsistencies between us and New Brunswick or what have you. I think that

examining them to begin with is important, but then also I one hundred per cent agree with you that we do have to remove inconsistencies because otherwise they're just looking at a problem and enjoying it.

Mr. Drysdale: You can't ship beef from them. You can't ship beef from Grande Prairie to Dawson Creek because it crosses a border just because of the federal rules, which is crazy. But examining: we've looked at that for years. We know it's there, but that doesn't fix it.

Mr. Gotfried: Now that my colleague has gotten into some wordsmithing here, I'm wondering if we really want to be talking here – so examine, remove inconsistencies between provincial and federal. Are we talking about food inspection here or the products? I mean, I think we're talking about the process, which would be the food inspection, as opposed to the inspected food. It's the process which has inconsistencies between the federal and provincial sides that do not allow us to move products across provincial boundaries.

I guess, just to clarify, Mr. Coolahan, are we talking about the process of food inspection and how that should be fixed or the products and how we look at the products after the fact and then find a way to recertify them with a new inspection? I think it's really about the process if I'm understanding it correctly.

The Chair: Member Coolahan, if you want to respond.

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. Thank you, Chair. One of the items that came out was that the food inspection was a bit of an issue. I'm absolutely open to wordsmithing this. Let's get it right. That was one of the issues, though, that came up, the food inspection, which tied into the inability or ability for interprovincial trade.

Mr. Gotfried: It's that inconsistency of the process. If they were one process, then they could remove those barriers.

Mr. Coolahan: Yes. I'm with you.

Mr. Gotfried: So could you say "provincial and federal food inspection regulations"? "Process" didn't sound right. They're regulations because it's all regulated, right? It's all about the regulated.

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. I'm good with that.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Food inspection regulations is what Mr. Dach had suggested.

The Chair: Food inspection regulations, yeah.
Member McPherson.

7:30

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Chair. I'm going to put forward another suggestion to amend – is this a motion yet, or are we still just . . .

The Chair: It's not a motion. We're still wordsmithing it.

Ms McPherson: Okay. Cool. "Recommend the government determine inconsistencies" rather than "examine."

The Chair: Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. I guess I'm just having trouble working out how this would actually resolve the issue, as I understand it, for producers that want to bring meat products – that's where I've heard about more – across interprovincial borders. Correct me if I'm

wrong, but it's federal laws and regulations that you need to have federal inspection of interprovincial agricultural products. So it's not really a question of inconsistencies between the different types of inspection regimes but the different sort of legal, you know, precedents of them. Correct me if I'm wrong, but, I mean, I think the things that I've had are where smaller producers don't have access to federal inspection in order to be able to do this in any sort of affordable or accessible way.

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. If I remember correctly from presenters, with respect especially to meat processing and slaughtering, smaller abattoirs versus the large ones, I believe it was mentioned that smaller local abattoirs were provincially regulated rather than federally regulated, and there was an inconsistency there that was identified that we're trying to address with this motion. I think we're looking at basically having these inconsistencies identified and taking a look at regulations that explore strategies to expand into provincial trade.

For example, if the regulations in Alberta allow provincial inspectors to look at local abattoirs and slaughterhouses that produce meat for sale, some provincial regulations in other provinces might prohibit us from exporting it into that province because it's not federally inspected. You want to look at how those differences in provincial versus federal regulations may prohibit or impede interprovincial trade. That's, I think, exactly the precise problem that we're trying to look at.

I know that there are transportation regulations that govern how meat may be transported. For example, I know of a relative who operates a buffalo herd. I know an individual who went and shot an animal from that farm legally, and he wanted to transport it home, and that individual rancher issued a travel permit so that he could take it home and take it to a processor here in Edmonton to get the meat processed. So there is provincial regulation there on local meat processors and local meat production.

There definitely are things that could impede provincial trade that are provincial versus federal regulations that I think we are trying to directly address with this measure.

The Chair: Member Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. I'm going to suggest something here along the lines of what Mr. Dach was saying. I think that when I was crafting this, I painted us into a bit of a corner here around food inspection, so I don't want to do that. In crafting this, I'm looking at some of the submissions that are talking about lack of regulation for organic products, so it's not just food inspection, right? Alberta Forestry classified greenhouse growers as farming operations. Like, there are a lot of things. So I think I painted us into a corner with food inspection. I'd like it to say something more like "inconsistencies between provincial and federal agricultural industry regulations" or something to that effect, a little bit broader, so that we can deal with all the regulations that impact trade.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Coolahan, thank you for that because I think that we were painting ourselves into a corner. But I think that if we talk about what we did yesterday in one of the things, this is in the context of going forward from this committee on agrifood and agribusiness, so if you just leave it as regulation and it's in the context of agrifood and agribusiness, I think . . .

Mr. Coolahan: So you're saying . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Just regulation.

Mr. Coolahan: I'm fine with that.

Mr. Gotfried: Because it's in context, right?

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. I agree.

The Chair: Okay. So just having it say "provincial and federal regulations and explore."

Mr. Orr: Okay. Now are we back to including "municipal"?

Mr. Coolahan: Well, I guess if food inspectors . . .

Mr. Orr: I don't know. I'm just asking.

Mr. Gotfried: Just a comment on the municipal. It seems to me that, you know, I'm looking more at, like, urban agriculture that we see quite a bit of, which tends to be more community based, or in Calgary we have the fellow known as the Chicken Man, who always wants everybody to have chickens in their backyards. Those are governed by certain regulations, what types of animals and livestock you may be allowed to have in your yards, but I think typically those aren't related to trade. Those are generally related to personal consumption, and if they were other than that, they would be governed, then, I would suspect, by provincial and federal regulation, in any case, if they were selling any of those products commercially in any way, shape, or form. So I would suggest we don't wade into that particular one on this one.

Mr. Orr: All right. I think we've got it a little more honed now. I think it looks good.

Connolly: Did you want to say "determine" or "examine"? Did we determine which one we wanted?

The Chair: Mr. Coolahan, were you looking for "determine" or "examine"?

Mr. Coolahan: I'd like "determine," actually. I think it's a bit stronger.

Mr. Dach: I was just wondering about a third option, that we use the word "identify."

The Chair: Sorry. Mr. Dach, can you clarify?

Mr. Dach: I'm suggesting we consider using the word "identify" rather than "determine" or "examine."

Mr. Gotfried: How about "strive to"?

Mr. Coolahan: I am prepared at this point, unless there's any more discussion, to put this forward as a motion.

The Chair: Mr. Roth, if you can read it in for the record.

Mr. Roth: Moved by Mr. Coolahan that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend the government identify inconsistencies between provincial and federal regulations and explore strategies to expand interprovincial trade.

The Chair: I'll open that motion up for discussion.

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the motion. I think we've already read it into the record, so we should be fine. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That

motion is carried. Congratulations. You're two for three with no amendments.

Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. I noticed we went from point 4 to point 6, so I was kind of wanting to bring ourselves back to point 5 if that's okay, Mr. Chair. I'll just go right to this so that we can have something and we can start working with it if that's okay.

This is based on a letter, you know, that we got from Mackenzie county. Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend the government continue to lobby the federal government to provide reliable rail transportation to and from northern Alberta so that agribusiness goods have better access to Alberta and international markets.

The Chair: I'll open up the . . .

Sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: I just want to finish off. What they were looking for is being able to have that access. I think it's important that we bring that up and enable them to have that access. It remains a mechanism that's out there.

The Chair: I'll open this topic for discussion. Member McPherson.

Ms McPherson: I'm going to take a pass right now. Thanks.

7:40

The Chair: Okay. Any other people wishing to discuss this topic? Member Connolly.

Connolly: Sure. I'll go ahead. As was mentioned in the motion, it is federal jurisdiction, and as a provincial committee we can't really make meaningful recommendations to the federal government. I'm not opposed to the motion. I just want to reiterate that we literally have no jurisdiction over rail in the province. The government has been doing this for years. I'm sure Mr. Drysdale knows better than I do that it's been happening for quite a long time that the government has been lobbying the federal government for more rail access. In reality it doesn't really do too, too much than what's already been happening in governments for decades. I really want to. At this point I can't see a problem with it. I don't know if something will come to me later. At this point I don't know if Mr. Drysdale or Mr. Gotfried might have more insight on this. I don't see that big of a reason for this motion, but I'm open to discussion.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Chairman, through the chair, these people were representing a fairly big area up there near the Peace. They have a serious issue, apparently, with getting organic grain, barley, lots of grains to market without trucking, I guess. There isn't enough rail up there. I mean, you're right. Mr. Drysdale may very well understand the rail lines up there a lot better than I do. They sat right over on that end, and they were quite concerned with being able to get grain movement. I mean, how can you go wrong by having something in place that suggests that the government continue to lobby? The federal government may say no for the next 100 years, but we can't be caught, in my opinion, ignoring the issue.

The Chair: Mr. Connolly, if you want to respond.

Connolly: Yeah. Well, like I said, I have no problem supporting the motion, but it is just supporting what the government has been doing for quite a long time. I'm sure everyone would like to see more rail up north. Well, across every province, really, they've always had a problem with rail, whether that be northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or here, even B.C. Well, yeah, every province

except, really, the Maritimes. I don't really have a problem supporting the motion as it's written.

Mr. van Dijken: I think what we heard from Mackenzie county was, essentially, reliable rail. They have rail transportation but are experiencing some difficulties with rail. We're actually quite fortunate where we're at on the prairies that in this jurisdiction, in the Edmonton area, we have extremely good rail service compared to a lot of other areas. I think what Mackenzie county was feeling left out on a little bit was that there wasn't enough pressure being put on by government to make sure that the rail companies were providing the service that's necessary to provide reliability in being able to market their grains and so on effectively.

Mr. Gotfried: I support this motion. Just doing some quick research here, there are some little-known facts: 4.3 million acres of cropland in the Peace River region. That represents 181,000 acres of 244,000 total in the province. So if we don't have good transportation there – I think this is worth while, so I would absolutely support this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's quite timely in that we know that the current government has an effective track record of lobbying the federal government to obtain approval for transmission rights-of-way and railways and other means of transportation. The right approach can result in approvals for perhaps even a railway. I know it works for pipelines, so why not railways?

The Chair: Mr. Drysdale.

Mr. Drysdale: Yeah. I don't want to belabour the point, but "continue to lobby" is, you know, one of those other statements we used before that really says nothing. As a former grain producer in northern Alberta and ex-Transportation minister I lobbied the federal government. It's not so much the federal government; it's CN, the rail companies. CN almost has more power than the federal government. Believe me, the provincial government has lobbied strongly to the federal government and CN to do it, and we should continue to. It's not going to change anything, but it's a good motion.

The Chair: Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. That's kind of how I feel. I mean, loud and clear we heard that it's an issue, so, yes, we should probably support it. It's a fuzzy one for me, though, grey, because they not only ask for physical but also social infrastructure improvements. But this is a key step. I agree; it's as much about economics as it is about bureaucracy on those rail lines, so it's going to be a difficult one to get to, but I think we should probably just support it.

Mr. Gotfried: It sounds to me, though, as my colleague Mr. Drysdale said, that the lobbying needs to include not just the federal government but CN Rail, or maybe we should be adding in major rail providers or . . .

Mr. Orr: Is there more than one rail company?

Mr. Gotfried: Just CN.

Mr. Orr: That's the problem. No competition.

Mr. Gotfried: It's really CN. Historically there are two rail companies. CN and CP Rail are pretty powerful and probably need

to be lobbied directly, so I would just suggest that maybe we add that in. I don't know what the correct description would be but "major rail companies," so "federal government and major rail companies." Okay. Maybe take out "major" if it isn't appropriate or relevant; just "rail companies."

Mr. Koenig: I might just make a small suggestion if the committee does wish to go in the direction of referencing companies. Maybe instead of using the word "lobby," use the word "urge" just because "lobby" can have a legal meaning to it. Especially if you're talking about companies, a better approach may be to use the word "urge."

Mr. Gotfried: Maybe we should just say "rail industries" or "rail industry." It could be some new company that – another company could emerge. It's not likely, but, well, there is Cando.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to discuss this? Seeing none, Mr. Taylor, are you looking to move this?

Mr. Taylor: I'd like to move that. That's good.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Roth, if you want to read it in for the record.

Mr. Roth: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Moved by Mr. Taylor that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government continue to urge the federal government and the rail industry to provide reliable rail transportation to and from northern Alberta so that agribusiness goods have better access to Alberta and international markets.

The Chair: I'll open up the motion for discussion.

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the motion. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Back to deliberations. Are there any other members wishing to bring forward any items?

Mr. Gotfried: I have one, jumping a little bit back here, but I was just doing a little bit of research on some international market information, looking at websites for Australia and some other markets with respect to export information, export market intelligence, and tools for exporters. We don't seem to have great tools or market intelligence information. It's very statistically driven and not what I'm calling informationally driven or good for maybe a first-time exporter.

Aaron, I e-mailed this to you, so I'd like to propose that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government improve online market intelligence information and tools for exporters through in-depth market research and key competitor analysis.

The Chair: Are you moving a motion, or is this for a discussion?

7:50

Mr. Gotfried: For discussion. Okay. Apologies. It's kind of jumping back to the market access piece a bit, but I just found us lacking, and I think this could be very helpful, particularly when we're trying to encourage smaller producers to get into the export market.

The Chair: Mr. Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. I think the danger at this point is that we start throwing out motions or even potential motions that are going to be redundant. I'm just wondering if we haven't already passed a motion that has covered this.

Mr. Orr: While I don't disagree with the concept, I'm not sure that I heard that from any of our presenters.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried, do you care to comment?

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. I don't think we heard – I mean, I think the challenge is that we heard from the people that are already quite entrenched and working on this through the industry associations, that are fairly knowledgeable.

I was just looking through it. You know, one of our challenges that I see – and this also came up in our Public Accounts Committee meeting – is that we're being overshadowed significantly by the Australians in the largest growth markets for us, like India, China, Taiwan, Indonesia. I was just peeking at their websites a little while ago, and they have really great websites. They have a much higher market share. I'll give you an example: 36,000 tonnes of beef going into Taiwan. I don't know what our number is, but I'll bet you it's not a fraction of that.

So we have a lot to learn from some other markets and opportunities to learn, and I'm not sure that we have directed our efforts towards anything other than being fledgling, when we can actually learn from our competitors, particularly the U.S. and Australia, in penetrating some of these high-growth markets.

Mr. Coolahan: I just would ask for a bit of clarity from Mr. Gotfried on this on what online market intelligence information is. I'm not quite familiar with that the way it's framed here.

Mr. Gotfried: Well, I was just looking – for example, there's a group called Austrade, austrade.gov.au, and it has rather amazing profiles, market opportunities, links, overviews of submarkets, which are done in a very user-friendly way. I look at some of ours, and it tends to be graphs and statistics.

Mr. Coolahan: Oh, so that would be ours, is what you're saying, for other people to look at. Okay. Now I've got you.

Mr. Gotfried: For Alberta exporters or potential exporters to have a better tool. We live in an online world.

Mr. Coolahan: Got you.

Mr. Gotfried: If we want smaller producers to be able to do it and we send them scurrying to try and find information – information will be power in us trying to leverage our export opportunities, and I don't think we're doing it very well. This is really meant to put a signal to government that maybe we need to have better market research and do some real in-depth competitor analysis and make sure that we have that done well.

So this is really an encouragement for us to do better. It's not much more than that at this point in time. But I think that as soon as we do some competitor analysis, we're going to find out very quickly the inadequacies of what we're currently doing. Having been involved myself a lot in international marketing, when I look at things like this, I go: wow; that's a great tool. And we don't have great tools. So that would be my point.

Mr. Coolahan: No. Thank you. I wasn't really quite sure what that meant, but I appreciate it.

Mr. Gotfried: Apologies for not being clear.

The Chair: Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. I agree with the motion in principle. I just have concerns about: how do you quantify it? It

almost sounds like, I mean, looking for better intelligence information. At what cost? That is my main concern. I'm assuming that there are organizations – for one, explore local – that we were talking about earlier, that are probably looking into initiatives like this. I think we should leverage what we have right now. So that would be my only concern, but I'm happy either way.

Mr. Gotfried: You know what? This is just a suggestion. I would encourage you to look at this Austrade and compare it to what we have. It's night and day. It's actually a little embarrassing to look at ours versus theirs because somebody who is not experienced in export marketing could look at theirs and go: wow; look at this. And somebody will look at ours and go: another statistical graph. That's not very welcoming for a new exporter. This is really just looking at it from a very practical perspective, but we know how much business – I mean, if you're a producer of a product in Peace River country and you're going, "Wow. I really should be having a better export market. I'm going to go online and check this out," I don't think they're going to find out too much, you know. And that's often the first window that people look at in terms of their opportunities to become more involved in export market development.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. Just a quick question. This is with the Australian government, not, like, the government of Queensland or the government of another Australian province. Is that correct, Mr. Gotfried?

Mr. Gotfried: Yes.

Connolly: Do the provinces have such a thing, or is it just with the federal government, and if so, do we have a similar thing with our federal government?

Mr. Gotfried: No. I looked at both our federal and provincial, and both of them are relatively weak in comparison. But – you know what? – when we look at this, Alberta has the most to gain.

Connolly: Right.

Mr. Gotfried: So maybe it's one of those bull by the horns things here in Alberta. Pardon the pun. You know, if we take the bull by the horns here with wheat and beef and pork opportunities and some of the legumes and we mirror what these guys are doing, we will create a great portal for our potential exporters. Maybe this is a little bit too much in the weeds. You know what? It's glaring. Maybe if there's no appetite for this, then I would just suggest that I withdraw it. We're not formal here yet anyway. Take a look. I think you'll be surprised. We should be doing better for Albertans.

Connolly: Thanks.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the item at hand?

Mr. van Dijken: Is it maybe able to be resurrected if we just end at "exporters" and drop the last two lines there? I stumble over the last two lines in that it becomes quite broad, and I think it gets a little bit more identifying, encourages the government to find ways to improve this for exporters.

Mr. Gotfried: So maybe more the what than the how? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm okay with that if there's an appetite here.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried, do you wish to move this motion?

Mr. Gotfried: I will. Yeah. I think that this is a simple one. I don't think we need to have a lot of discussion on it, but I think it would be a positive one for us to include in our recommendations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Roth, can you read it in for the record?

Mr. Roth: Moved by Mr. Gotfried that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government improve online market intelligence information and tools for exporters.

The Chair: With that, I'll open it up for discussion.

Mr. Drysdale: Not to drag it out again, but if you could just add one word, market "access." Like, add "access" after "market" because I don't think it'll do the producers any good to have intelligence tools if what they're looking for is market access.

The Chair: Mr. Drysdale, you're wishing to move an amendment or just kind of throwing it out there for discussion?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, I know if I was trying to sell agriculture products, I'd be looking for market access, not intelligence, you know? I mean, intelligence is good, too. You need that first. But the access is what you need.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. On the site that I look at here, market access is part of the intelligence as well. So I don't know if whether there's an appreciation and understanding, that we need to put in "market access" or whether that's – if we say "market intelligence information," that, in your mind, would include access information?

The Chair: Mr. Drysdale, I just want to confirm: are you making an amendment to this?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, if everybody agrees that we don't need it, fine. I'm not the word specialist. As long as we have access, take it out if you want.

The Chair: Yeah. I just have to double-check because it's an official motion.

Mr. Drysdale: Withdraw it.

The Chair: Mr. Carson.

8:00

Mr. Carson: Thanks, Chair. I was just going to say that I think it's somewhat implied in the online market intelligence information. I mean, it's getting that information to improve market access. So I think it's fine the way it is.

Mr. Dach: I'd just like to say that I appreciate Mr. Drysdale's rural philosophy that as long as the cows get home, it doesn't matter what gate they get through.

The Chair: All right. On the motion is there any further discussion? Seeing none, I'll call the question on the motion. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

We are back on deliberations. Are there any other items that members wish to bring forward? Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. I would kind of like to take a stab at that glaring one that was in there that talks about legislation. You know, we're talking about the sequestration of carbon dioxide, and that one had been pointed out to us several times. Farmers and people in the industry should be compensated. If we're going to be taxing one person on one side, we should be giving credit to somebody on the other side. There should be a balance in that. I'd like to take a stab at that one just to put this on the record so that we can have, I guess, that discussion, because it was brought up by many of the different presenters.

The Chair: Just to clarify, you're putting this up for wordsmithing to be discussed?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. You can put it up. I'll give you some of the wording here.

Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that in order to grow and diversify the agrifood and agribusiness sectors, the government introduce legislation to enable agricultural industries that sequester carbon dioxide as part of their regular business to receive rebates from the government from carbon tax revenues.

The Chair: All right. Let's open this item up for discussion. Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure personally that I have enough understanding to be able to support this at this point. Essentially, you're asking for money to go to this industry. We have taken steps to alleviate some of the concerns, the energy efficiency grants for farms, the \$10 million, among many other things that I could list, but I'm not going to.

I'm going to propose a separate wordsmithing, I suppose, that we could set beside it, and maybe we could discuss that. My potential, unofficial motion would be that

we recommend to the government that they find ways to leverage carbon reduction strategies and incentives to increase efficiency and sustainability of Alberta agriculture.

I would just add to that, if I may, Mr. Chair, that I think it's a bit broader. I don't know that necessarily focusing on one specific example is the best way forward, but that's open to debate, of course.

The Chair: Mr. Orr, I had you on the speakers list.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I was actually just going to throw in a slightly different kind of question, comment. These two are interesting. The question I was going to ask is – and I throw it out there purely as a question in terms of what's the most agreeable and appropriate way to move forward on it, whether it should be about rebates or whether it should be, as the greenhouse growers got, an exemption because of agricultural growth and because of the fact that they're consuming carbon. So that was my question: should it be rebates, or should it be exemptions? Maybe Mr. Carson's – I don't know. I'll just throw it out there.

The Chair: Member Carson, do you wish to comment?

Mr. Carson: I believe that incentives could encompass either of those opportunities. That's open for debate, of course.

Mr. Schneider: I think what we heard when the submissions were made here – and correct me if I'm wrong; I don't have it in front of me – was that the guys that were grazing cattle believed that they

are sequestering carbon. I guess the greenhouses are sequestering carbon, certainly. They actually pump carbon into there in a lot of cases. Farmers that grow grain: of course, there's grain that sequesters carbon for a portion of its life. That was brought up here as well. I expect hemp would be the same thing. That's the idea, I think.

You know, it's unfortunate. I'm not going to get political, but it's almost like we'll have winners and losers here. The greenhouse guys got 80 per cent. Now we've got guys over here that are saying: well, okay; what did they say and do, so that I can kind of get some of that, too? That's kind of where this is at. Believe it or not, I hear this a lot.

I think the original motion was – and maybe it's not wordy enough, or it's not strong enough. But the idea was that for the guys that do sequester – look, I mean, I haven't read the climate leadership plan, to be perfectly honest, from one end to the other, but it seems like there have been some amendments thrown in there. Maybe not amendments, but maybe there's the opportunity for amendments. That's what this motion, I think, is probably based on. I may be sticking things in your mouth that aren't accurate. But the folks that were sequestering carbon would be looking for some kind of a carbon rebate or whatever.

The Chair: Mr. Piquette, I wasn't sure if I saw your hand up.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. Well, I'm just responding, actually, to what Mr. Schneider was talking about. My understanding of the logic behind the greenhouse growers' rebate was that it was much more about – it was based on the exemption they were able to get through B.C. based on a similar argument. You know, they made a very strong argument that way. So it wasn't because of the CO₂, right?

I mean, of course, the idea behind the climate leadership program, as I understand it, is that we're trying to actually reduce our carbon footprint. It's meant to be a progressive thing. So I think that philosophically – I could be wrong about that – we're not really looking at trying to give credits for people doing what they're already doing but looking at using it in ways to incentivize behaviour.

8:10

So I would, you know, strongly support Member Carson's motion because I think it leaves it open to be able to frame that in multiple ways that are going to benefit our agriculture, agribusiness without unnecessarily boxing us into one particular strategy that might not be the way for us to go.

Mr. Drysdale: I'm not sure how to say this without offending anyone. I don't want to get political. It's been awful pleasant here. As Mr. Dach likes to phrase it, it's kind of like shutting the barn door after the horse left. Farmers are way ahead of the government on carbon reduction. When you come to zero till or minimum till and the amount of carbon used to produce wheat today, farmers have come a long way in 15, 20 years. Now you're going to incent after they've done it, like, so they won't get any of that.

As far as increased efficiencies, to go from 25 bushels per acre of canola to 50 bushels, you know, the farmers have been doing this. They've been doing really good work in being sustainable, and they've almost got to the point where they can hardly squeeze any more out of it. Now you want to incent to do better after they've done all that work. I mean, I get it, but I'm not sure. They've done a pile of good work, and they're not going to get incented for that, I guess.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. Actually, kind of building on what Mr. Drysdale said, they are doing things that exist. However, they're not always in line with realizations from either government or other organizations. The problem with carbon sequestration and Mr. Taylor's motion is that, well, to begin with, carbon sequestration can't be measured, so you can't really tell how much you're actually sequestering. However, with Mr. Carson's motion it actually includes looking at what people are already doing to reduce their carbon footprint. It's really looking at what already exists and how we can benefit from things that are already happening outside of this jurisdiction as well. If we just look at carbon sequestration, it kind of puts us in a box, and it doesn't really allow for us to look at what other industries are doing, what other jurisdictions are doing. That's kind of why I have a bit of a problem with it.

Mr. Taylor: Going back, I guess, I still say that, you know, when we're talking about carbon and we're talking about who's producing carbon, because that's what's on the table right now with the climate leadership plan here, to say that people are consuming carbon, therefore they should be paying for it, and the ones that are taking it off the table – and there have been studies done that show how much carbon is being sequestered. So, I mean, arguably, I think if we brought that forward and said, "You have to quantify how much you are in fact doing," then I think that industry would be more than willing to go ahead and find out exactly how much carbon they're taking in.

To the point that Mr. Piquette had brought up, there's a rebate in B.C. to the greenhouses because they want to keep them competitive, as I understand it, if I'm reading that correctly. But there's no carbon tax in Saskatchewan, so I don't see why we're charging the farmers anything on carbon tax as it is because, using the same logic, there should be no carbon tax if we're going to go and use that same line of thinking.

So I still think that we need to – if you're going to take from one hand, you've got to give to the other one. There's got to be a balance, and it's got to equal out to being a level playing field.

The Chair: Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think most of my comments have been reiterated, but I just want to go back to Mr. Drysdale and say that I do appreciate that farmers – I mean, it's a piece of their business line that they need to be sustainable and they need to reduce emissions and costs altogether. I totally respect that. But I would just add that with some of the programs that we've seen in terms of incentives for farmers to be able to put solar panels up on their property – and we've seen that in a few instances throughout the province already, working in partnership with the provincial government – there are still opportunities for us to move forward in reducing emissions. Once again, they have come a long way, for sure, but I do still believe that we can do more.

I would also just reiterate the fact that I think we are getting into a position where we're boxing ourselves in here. We're picking a winner and a loser.

Finally, I would say that I'm sure that the department is looking at the possibilities of this. Of course, I haven't had any discussions with them, so I don't know where they sit right now, but I'm sure it's been in discussion.

To be honest, I'm not comfortable supporting the motion as it is right now.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. Actually, kind of moving on what Mr. Taylor was saying, that carbon sequestration could actually go under the lens

of leveraged carbon reduction strategies. We already can include that within Mr. Carson's motion. In that way, like we were saying before, it's not just looking at one particular way of reducing carbon and, really, just putting ourselves in a box for incentives to increase efficiencies. I really think that looking at Mr. Carson's motion would be much better for industry. That way, they can do what's best for them rather than looking at specifically sequestering carbon and rather than looking at a whole other realm of things across jurisdictions, whether it be here in Canada or the United States or wherever it be, to really increase their efficiencies.

I think that would be best, moving forward with Mr. Carson's motion, not a motion yet, and it would be best for industry as well in terms of competitiveness.

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. I tend to concur. I think that Mr. Carson's suggestion does strike the right balance. I do believe that the other suggested motion is too restrictive and does tend to pick winners and losers. I'd prefer that we proceed and perhaps ask Mr. Carson to formalize his motion now.

The Chair: Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I think I can live with the shorter version, but I think I would like to ask for one short, two-word addition just to affirm what Member Connolly said. I mean, if the goal really is to reduce carbon, then this fits in there. After the word "reduction," I would just add in the words "and sequestration strategies."

The Chair: Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. I appreciate that. I guess it's just that I think that with carbon reduction, you don't actually destroy carbon. So when you're talking about carbon reduction, I think it's meant to be, you know, strategies for keeping carbon in its carbon dioxide form, which you'd think would include sequestration as one of the possibilities. I think it would be encapsulated. I don't think it takes anything away.

I just also do want to dispute the idea that our agricultural industry has reached its peak efficiency and has done all that it can. I mean, there are amazing developments and breakthroughs in cattle feed, you know, in different types of fertilizers that are effective at locking down carbon, and these are things that are hugely beneficial. If you want to go back to 25, 30 years ago, summerfallowing was the peak of dryland farming technology – right? – and where are we today? I don't think we want to foreclose any options or be pessimistic about what our industry can do.

So I just want to speak in favour of Member Carson's amendment as it stands.

8:20

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I'm quite happy with this second option. I would like to see the sequestration included in that because, again, I think that that's a key part of the whole carbon reduction/sequestration strategy.

I like the fact that we've got incentives in there. I know that we're in a difficult economic time in this province, and as much as I know that everybody would like to run out and invest in reducing their carbon footprint by getting the latest and greatest equipment, that's not possible for a lot of businesses right now, so the incentives part, I think, is good. Those incentives won't get everybody moving as quickly as we might like, but at least that's embedded in there. I think that's a positive thing. Some people, unfortunately, can't

afford to move to that point at this juncture in our economy. Let's hope that as we move forward, the economy improves, local consumption increases, margins increase, and then they can start looking at that as a payback in a shorter period of time.

But I think this is good. I would like to see the "and sequestration strategies" included just because I think it makes it a more robust motion.

The Chair: Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to put forward a motion that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government find ways to leverage carbon reduction and sequestration strategies and incentives to increase efficiency and sustainability of Alberta agriculture.

The Chair: I'll open up the discussion on the motion at hand.

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

I'll have Mr. Roth read it into the record.

Mr. Roth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moved by Member Carson that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government find ways to leverage carbon reduction and sequestration strategies and incentives to increase efficiency and sustainability of Alberta agriculture.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

We're back on deliberations. Are there any other items members wish to bring forward?

Mr. Orr: I'm going to skip over 8 and 9 because I'm not real strong on what I would say for either one of them, but in section 10 I think there are some things we definitely need to put in there. So let's put this up there for wordsmithing right now, okay?

Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government ensure that the educational curriculum for students in Alberta includes a component related to agriculture to promote the understanding and interest in the agrifood and agribusiness sectors in Alberta.

The Chair: Mr. Orr, the challenge we have with this motion kind of runs twofold. The first one is that the initial review was to look at ways that we can expand value-added production and diversify our agrifood sector. This starts to skirt away from it. Then the second challenge that you have is that it falls within education, which is, unfortunately, not in the purview of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. So I'm not sure if you want to change that in any way.

Mr. Orr: Well, it is something that we did hear from a number of presenters, so that's why I throw it up there. I'm interested to hear other people's opinions on it, other people's thoughts about it, other ways that it can be made appropriate.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. Unfortunately, I have to agree with the chair that within education we just don't have the purview. You would have to bring it to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities because they're the ones that would deal with education. We only, unfortunately, deal with advanced education, and this one wouldn't really fit under the purview of advanced education. You wouldn't really succeed in what you want to accomplish.

Mr. Orr: Fair enough. I hear that. I do think, though, that it is an important item, but maybe we can't deal with it.

Connolly: I would actually completely agree that it is important and that we should include it in the curriculum. However, I don't see any way for our committee to be able to put this forward.

Mr. Gotfried: Maybe just check with our resources here: can we make a recommendation to another committee, seeing as we've done the research?

Mr. Koenig: To be honest, no, I'm not aware of a means of having a committee make recommendations or referrals to another committee. What you may wish to do here, though, is ensure that all the recommendations are focused within the scope of the original mandate of this review. I mean, you could do some wordsmithing here to recommend that the ministry of agriculture work with other ministries of the government to emphasize agricultural education with a goal of – you know, I'm just sort of throwing words out there, somehow touching back on the original motion – growing and diversifying the agrifood and agribusiness sector, exposing Albertans to that sector as a means of growing and diversifying, something along those lines. That may get you within that broad scope of the original motion.

Mr. Orr: Yeah, I'd be prepared to go that route, that we encourage Alberta Agriculture and Forestry . . .

Connolly: It could recommend industry to encourage . . .

Mr. Orr: Yeah, recommend, something like that. Sure. You know what? I mean, I'd even be happy to see it broader than just the education curriculum. I don't know how you would say that. Maybe going broader just makes it too complicated. Maybe we should just stay with one focus, that

the Minister of Ag and Forestry consult with the Department of Education about including agriculture in the curriculum to enhance the agrifood and agribusiness sectors in Alberta.

Can we just say that? Does that work?

The Chair: Rolling back, we're trying to wordsmith the proposal in the right column there: have Forestry co-ordinate with other government ministries to strengthen agricultural education.

Mr. Gotfried: I don't know if this will work, but maybe it softens it enough.

Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government through Alberta Agriculture and Forestry encourage the inclusion of educational content in the curriculum for Alberta students to promote understanding and interest in the agrifood and agribusiness sectors in Alberta.

Does that soften it enough?

The Chair: Sorry. If you can do that again.

Mr. Gotfried: I've got a method here. I just e-mail it to Aaron.

The Chair: If you can do that again, Mr. Gotfried. We're hitting that 8:30 hump.

8:30

Mr. Gotfried: The reason I say that is that, you know, we did hear this from some of our presenters. I think it's a really great initiative, particularly for urban students. Many never get a chance to set foot on a farm in their entire school lives, and anything we can do to encourage that I think is a really positive thing.

The Chair: I open the discussion on what has been proposed by Mr. Gotfried.

Seeing no one, would we like to move what Mr. Gotfried has on the table?

Mr. Gotfried: I would.

The Chair: All right. Mr. Roth, if you can just read that for the record, please.

Mr. Roth: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Moved by Mr. Gotfried that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, encourage the inclusion of educational content in the curriculum for Alberta students to promote understanding and interest in the agrifood and agribusiness sectors in Alberta.

The Chair: I'll open up that motion for discussion.

Connolly: I just want to verify with Mr. Koenig if that works within the purview.

Mr. Koenig: Well, absolutely. The agriculture ministry is within the scope of this committee, so if the recommendation is that that ministry encourage the inclusion of that material for Alberta students, I mean, that would be within the scope of the committee's mandate.

Connolly: Thanks.

The Chair: Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to say that I feel that I can support this motion. I think that when we talk about agrifood and value-added, I mean, what better place to start than in the classroom? So I think that we can hopefully achieve some good things from this.

Thanks.

The Chair: Any further discussion on the motion at hand?

Seeing none, I will call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Are there any other items that members wish to bring forward?

Mr. Schneider: I'll try one last one. I won't make a motion. I'll just put it out there so we can work on it, because it seems to get complicated when we make a motion. I think we heard from several submitters that use temporary foreign workers, and I think that their message kind of was to try – I don't know if it was to urge the federal government, again, to relax some of those laws because, I mean, when we get to slaughter plants or packing plants, I guess, in Alberta, those are well-paying jobs, but it's hard to find Albertans that are interested in taking the jobs. I get the whole let's try and keep it all inside the province, but we have two major businesses that really have trouble attracting local workers. It isn't a job that just anybody can do.

Mr. Taylor: Or wants to do.

Mr. Schneider: Or wants to do, yeah.

They did talk about foreign workers, the regulations being relaxed so that they could stay longer in agrifood and agribusiness. I mean, it does fit the whole mandate of the program, I understand. Do you want me to put something on there and then we can start from there? Is that probably the best thing to do?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Schneider: So I'd say:

Have the government of Alberta strongly urge the federal government to continue to admit temporary foreign workers into Canada to work in the agrifood and agribusiness industries in the province.

The Chair: I'll open up that topic for discussion. Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. I kind of have an issue with this – it's not a motion – just mostly because we started this inquiry because we wanted to get Albertans back to work, and realistically I don't believe that a conversation about bringing in more temporary foreign workers will assist us to bring Albertans back to work. It's just kind of odd that that's how we started, and then we're kind of moving into bringing more people into the country to work when the original purview was to get Albertans back to work. So that's kind of my issue with it.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. You know what? It's interesting. In the time I spent with Calgary Economic Development, there was a lot of conversation, lots of controversy on temporary foreign workers. I think what we always found in Alberta, during the boom times particularly, was that every time we brought in a temporary foreign worker, which we needed here, we were stealing somebody's job in somebody's basement halfway across the country. Temporary foreign workers: I think that if we do the research – I know it wasn't sort of a huge red flag for us, but the agriculture sector thrives on that across the country, whether that's in, you know, Lower Mainland B.C., whether that's in Ontario. In Alberta I think it's just been less visible for us, but I think it is an essential component, and I think we've struggled with the fact that our quotas both for temporary foreign workers and immigration are very inadequate during times when we have a shortage of labour.

The only thing I would add is that, really, the solution here is actually not always the temporary foreign workers but also the immigration regulations and quotas. So I would suggest that maybe if we can add that into this, we'll actually have a much more balanced approach because the first thing we want, actually, is for new immigrants to come here, put down stakes, and make Alberta their home. Let's be honest. We see in many different industries – and I say it every day: thank God for many of our new immigrants who take many jobs that many Canadian-born people don't seem to want for various reasons.

I think that if we could embed that into this as well while we're doing a little bit of wordsmithing, it would be a really positive thing. Then we'd cover both bases and not skew to one versus the other.

The Chair: Mr. Taylor and then Ms Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Just to add, I think, to the previous comments and to Mr. Connolly's as well, you're talking about not necessarily just bringing in more people to Alberta, but if we added, perhaps at the very end and just said, "that are suffering from identified labour shortages," you know, if we put that in there so that we know that there's a labour shortage in that sector, then those are the ones that we're going to bring the foreign workers to. It's not just to bring in temporary foreign workers; it's for the ones that are seeing a labour shortage.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. I kind of go with Michael's first point about: we began the conversation talking about Albertans that work. We know that we've got people out of work that worked in

the oil patch, and as Member Schneider said, it's decent-paying jobs. I've got to go with getting our own people back to work first. I recognize that for years there were shortages in that area. It's a tough job. It's a dangerous job. But it is really important that we get our people back to work.

The Chair: Member Connolly.

Connolly: Yeah. Just to build on what Mr. Gotfried and Ms Fitzpatrick were saying, I believe that the temporary foreign worker program is not exactly the best program that we've ever created as a country. I find that it's much better to bring in new immigrants to the country rather than temporary foreign workers because we never know exactly where they're going to end up in 10 years, and a lot of times they want to put down roots here in Alberta but are forced to go back. So bringing in new immigrants who are interested and have education in these files is better than bringing in temporary foreign workers. I'd be much more inclined to talk about working with the federal government and industry to make sure that companies have workers and Albertans can access those jobs or bringing in immigrants from other jurisdictions rather than supporting the temporary foreign worker program en masse.

8:40

The Chair: Mr. Schneider, did you care to comment?

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. You know, temporary foreign workers are what makes it tick at the moment, so I'm not arguing that what you're saying isn't accurate. I'm going to quote:

Every day meat processing facilities... are operating with hundreds of vacant workstations. It's making the meat-packing industry uncompetitive, and because full carcass value is not being realized, the impact ripples right back to producers through the entire beef value chain. These challenges must be resolved. We ask for support for the agriculture and agrifood workforce action plan, enhanced access to foreign workers, and let's ensure that things like the provincial nominee program are working well and that processing times are reasonable.

Now, immigration, I guess, is probably something that's out of our purview. Listen, I agree with everything you say, and if we can hire Albertans to go stand in blood up to their ankles and work in those plants, I'm all for it. What these guys were saying is: they don't want those jobs. Now, I'll just leave it at that. What they asked for was some enhancement to being able to get people that'll actually come and do the job. You know, I really am not dying on this hill either, folks. I'm just not.

The Chair: Mr. Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thanks, Chair. Well, I'm glad to hear that. I don't support having temporary foreign workers here, but I do support the philosophy behind this. I'd rather see something that just says: "access to labour." Also, it's fairly redundant at the end here because that's how you get a temporary foreign worker. You have to identify that you have a labour shortage, and then you have to apply. That's the process. I guess my point is that I'd rather just see "access to labour" in there rather than "temporary foreign worker."

The Chair: Member Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. I'm happy to report that I had the privilege in 1977 of working at Canada Packers, where I stood in blood up to my ankles, and I was damn happy to have that job. It was a good job. It was a well-paying job. It got me my first year of university, my first car, and a trip to Europe, amongst other things.

Things have changed since 1977 in that industry and other agricultural service industries, where temporary foreign workers now make up a much larger percentage of the workforce. Those people who came from other countries that I worked with back then were a smaller percentage. They weren't temporary foreign workers; they were people brought over here as immigrants. That changes something that I'd be more inclined to want to examine or encourage the examination of in any motion we look at with respect to temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector because there has been a substantive change, and there are reasons why we now rely on temporary foreign workers.

I agree. We do rely on them in the agricultural sector, in some places more irreplaceably than others, but there are many sectors where it may well be that we've reduced the attractiveness to the Alberta worker in ways that make them turn to other opportunities for employment. So maybe we should be looking at efforts to make farm labour jobs and agricultural food labour jobs more attractive to resident Albertans rather than trying to improve access to temporary foreign workers, who otherwise wouldn't be necessary if the jobs were attractive to resident Albertans.

In any case, that's my two cents' worth on the matter, and I continue to be proud of the work I did at a very well-run Canada Packers plant in 1977.

The Chair: I just want to make sure that members are aware of the time. It's a quarter to 9, so brevity is important.

Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. Just a couple of comments. I agree with the need to consider Albertans first. I also want to read a couple of the statements that were sort of added here and are related to the fact that some of those people who are asking for increased access to labour emphasized: the need for a permanent and stable workforce, one. The other one: request permanency of foreign workers and immigrants.

I actually have a little bit of a problem with the temporary foreign worker program, especially with regard to bringing in unskilled labour. I've had a fair bit of experience with this because in my riding there's a guy who actually runs an immigration company. He's brought 3,000 to 4,000 temporary workers and permanent workers into Alberta over the last 10 years. Most of the people that he has tried to bring in he's brought in as skilled workforce rather than unskilled workforce. Almost in every case he's tried to bring them in ultimately as families, get them their permanent residency status, provide them a home and an Alberta standards paying job, help them write their trades exams so that they can actually be here in Canada. Out of the hundred that I have personally welcomed, I think all but three have been able to stay with their families, become permanent, stable workforce residents, and contribute a very positive impact to central Alberta in terms of labour.

I'm definitely not in favour of the transient foreign worker program. I think it has issues. I think if we can do as was mentioned, talk about access to labour and creating stable employment for immigrants, I think we can come to an agreement on this and figure out the right way to word it. I'm not sure that's the right wording at all, but I think if we work on it, we could get there and actually come up with something that would be beneficial all the way around.

Mr. Taylor: Immigration itself does not make a person want to go into the hog or the cattle industry. We can bring in immigrants – and Canada has been opening the doors to immigration – but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be going there into those industries, so we need still to look at some way to identify

how we can actually get those people. If the people in those industries are directly after that and trying to find somebody with the nominee program that they have, the AINP program, that, I think, helps more because we are identifying that this is the person that we want to come to this job. If we're just relying on immigration itself, well, they may want to stay in the cities. They may have no desire to work in, as was mentioned, you know, blood up to their ankles or whatever.

So it doesn't solve anything if we just rely on immigration itself. We still have to work within the confines of what they're asking us for, which is to be able to bring in workers that want to work, are willing to work in the hog or the cattle industry.

Mr. Orr: Can I respond to that?

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead.

Mr. Orr: I actually have to disagree with you, Wes, based on the experience that we've had in central Alberta. I'm not kidding you; there have been several thousand come in. When they come in as a semiskilled employee with the skills for a particular job – and it can include agriculture or husbandry or these different categories – in our experience in central Alberta with hundreds of them, they have actually chosen to stay in the rural communities. They are not all running off to the urban centres. They like where they live. They've got good, well-paying jobs. They are thriving and staying there. We're not losing them, and they're staying in their jobs. We've actually had some switch from one agricultural producer to another, but they've still stayed in the industry in which they have experience and semiskilled qualifications.

The Chair: Not to cut members off or anything like that. I'm just being cognizant of the time. I know that we're in some enthralling conversations. I want to throw it out there to the will of the committee if there's a consensus that we will want to go past 9 o'clock or if we want to move on to the next item on the agenda.

Mr. Orr: If we finish this last one, can we be done if we go a few minutes longer?

The Chair: Yeah, if that's the consensus of the committee, to finish this item and then move on to the next agenda items and finish deliberations.

Some Hon. Members: Sounds good.

The Chair: Okay. All right. So we have overall consensus. Okay. Member Connolly.

8:50

Connolly: Thank you. I actually have a different wording that might make everyone happy, hopefully, because that's what we all try to do. That's saying, maybe, that

[the committee] recommend that the government work with the federal government and industry to ensure that companies in the agrifood and agribusiness sectors have access to labour and Albertans have access to those jobs.

Thoughts, comments, concerns?

Mr. Gottfried: I like where you're going with this, Member Connolly. Where I was sort of thinking is that I think we're all in agreement here. I think we're talking around the same issue. Our objective is to employ Albertans first. Then the next group on the continuum should be Canadians, to attract them to migrate across the country for jobs we have here that they may not have locally. Then I would suggest immigrants and then probably temporary

foreign workers, who then also have access to the immigrant nominee program. Those are kind of the five groups, the continuum across that we'd like to look at. I mean, what I was kind of trying to think of is a way that we can encapsulate that.

I think you're moving in that kind of direction. Do you have it perfect? Maybe not quite yet, but I like where you're going because that should be our hierarchy, I would suggest, as Alberta legislators. But we don't exclude the ones at the far end of that because we may need them. So if we could find a way, which I think you're moving towards, so that we can say that we have a need, and we have to find a way to appropriately meet that need, if we can encourage through a motion the government to achieve that, then I think we're in the right direction.

Connolly: I think it might be difficult to name all those things in order.

Mr. Gotfried: I don't think you have to.

Connolly: Yeah.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm not going to wordsmith it at all. I'm just throwing it out there.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Any other members wanting to comment to Member Connolly's motion? Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. I'm just hearing the discussion going around, and I think that Member Connolly's motion seems to be the surest path to that that I can see. For example, we're not tying hands, and we're not foreclosing any options. You know, I appreciate Mr. Orr's appreciation for the nominee program and the benefit of involving immigrants, but once they've immigrated, they're Albertans, right? Albertans have access to these jobs. Of course, it's got to be a multifaceted strategy to attract labour. I mean, it's going to be education. This could even speak to some of the things we are leaving on the table: improving infrastructure, cultural, all that stuff. Right? I think it has a more of a – what is the word I am looking for? – comprehensive approach to that problem. I think that this should encapsulate what we're all looking for, so I would recommend we go for that.

Mr. Orr: Would it work if we just put a period after the word "labour"?

The Chair: Unfortunately, you can't do that with motions. You can do commas.

Mr. Orr: No. I mean put a period and delete everything after that.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Mr. Orr: I'm just suggesting. Is that acceptable? And then all of this stuff is left accessible. Just a thought.

Connolly: Personally, I think I'd rather leave it with "access to labour and Albertans have access to those jobs" because they're two different points, making sure that those who are not already in the sector have access to it. Seeing that those jobs exist for them rather than employers looking elsewhere to begin with, I think, is kind of what I was trying to push.

Mr. Gotfried: I know where you're coming from with that. I'm thinking maybe something to the effect of "have access to labour to balance the priorities of industry and Albertans." That's not exactly right, but where we're just saying meeting the needs of industry and

also with a priority on – I mean, as Member Piquette said, well, if they're Albertans, they're here; if they're Canadians who move here, they're Albertans; and if they're immigrants, they become Albertans as well. So the only real outliers there are the temporary foreign workers, who are residents. I'd like to see that we meet the needs of industry – I don't think the wordsmithing is quite right – but with a priority on Albertans, employing Albertans.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I understand. It's all good discussion. I actually like the one that Member Connolly has introduced. I do believe it encompasses the fact that we're working with the federal government and industry and identifying that if there is a labour shortage, there's a need to access labour if we are not able to support that locally, but it also highlights that Albertans need to be considered in this first. I think the fact that we're working with the federal government and industry shows that it's trying to balance the priorities of industry.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. I'm thinking that maybe what might work in here is: "to balance the priorities of industry while creating job opportunities for Albertans."

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. Sorry, Chair. I concur with Mr. van Dijken that the addition after the word "labour" is unnecessary and that the inclusion of "and industry" satisfies the need to acknowledge that industry consultation is included. So I would prefer that we just eliminate Mr. Gotfried's suggestions and go with the motion including industry up there and including the intent that Mr. Gotfried is unnecessarily trying to add.

Mr. Gotfried: Thanks.

The Chair: We were going so good.

Mr. Orr: By not saying anything out of silence – with regard to any kind of stable immigrant workforce, I guess, by not including anything about that at all, are we excluding that?

Connolly: No, because I think that's in "have access to labour," as in: if you cannot find it and Albertans are not looking for those jobs because Albertans already have access to those jobs, then you're looking for labour wherever that labour exists.

Mr. Orr: Well, I will agree that by talking to the federal government, it implies that. I just wondered if it should be named. But I'm okay with it.

Mr. Gotfried: How about this: access to labour with a priority on creating opportunities for Albertans.

Mr. Dach: You said you were okay.

Mr. Gotfried: I am never quite okay, you know. "While creating opportunities for Albertans." "With a priority on creating opportunities for Albertans."

The Chair: And striking out the remaining part.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. Just a little wordsmithing. I said I wouldn't wordsmith, but I did anyway.

Mr. Dach: Let's call the question.

The Chair: Well, we haven't heard the motion yet.

Mr. Connolly, would you like to move that motion?

Connolly: I'm just going to read it really quickly. Yeah, I think that's the exact same thing, just different words. Yeah, I'd be happy to move that.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Roth, if you can read that for the record, please.

Mr. Roth: Moved by Member Connolly that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that the government work with the federal government and industry to ensure that companies in the agrifood and the agribusiness sectors have access to labour with a priority on creating opportunities for Albertans.

The Chair: Any discussion on the matter?

Seeing none, I will call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Now, hearing some of the consensus that was coming from committee members, I'm assuming we have concluded the deliberation phase of the inquiry unless anyone else says we haven't.

Now the committee has arrived at the point of preparing a report to the Assembly. I would ask that Dr. Massolin please discuss the process, possibly briefly.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you. Yes, exactly. I know we're all waiting to get out of here, Mr. Chair, but I must say just for the record that this is an amazing example of multipartisan co-operation. It's quite remarkable, so I think you should all be commended for that, if I may say.

Now back to the script. All I really wanted to say is that the next step is for the committee, Mr. Chair, to give research services direction to prepare a draft report on its behalf. I just wanted to note as well that this draft report that we're about to prepare is something new, I think, for any committee of this Legislature. I mean, I see members around the table who've seen this report before for a previous Legislature, but this is the first time that a legislative policy committee has initiated a review of its own volition, of its own accord.

9:00

The report typically in previous Legislatures has been a little bit different. It's a little bit more substantive. It reflects in the first part some of the stakeholder feedback that the committee received that informs the later decisions that the committee has arrived at. The decisions are basically the recommendations that are made, so those will be included verbatim. But supporting those recommendations you'll have language, that we'll draft, that informs the decision-making process. In this case it won't be that hard because it was unanimous, I think, invariably, so that is very helpful.

We will draft that report on your instruction, of course, and then it will be distributed to committee members and ultimately approved. But I think that's your next step, so I won't anticipate any of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have a motion drafted right now. The one thing to acknowledge is that because we're going into estimates literally as the budget will be tabled tomorrow, we cannot meet on any other items except for discussing the estimates. Unless we come up with a motion that sort of recognizes that, the report could potentially

die. So what I would recommend, if it's the will of the committee and someone wants to move this motion, is that the report be approved by myself and the deputy chair, and then it will be tabled in the House following that.

Mr. Orr: That's legit?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Gottfried: May I ask that you include a member of the third party in that approval process?

The Chair: Yeah. We can amend that if you want. Which member of the third party?

Mr. Gottfried: We promised not to do any more work tonight.

The Chair: Oh, okay: and a member of the third party.

All right. I will read out a motion if someone wants to move it here. Mr. Orr. Moved by Mr. Orr that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future direct research services to prepare a report regarding its inquiry into growing and diversifying Alberta's agrifood and agribusiness sector and that the committee authorize the chair, deputy chair, and a member of the third party to approve the committee's final report to the Legislative Assembly on or before April 14, 2017.

Having heard the motion, all those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. All right. That motion is carried.

Now moving on to the timeline of the review, hon. members, the committee has now agreed to report on recommendations from this inquiry. The draft report will be circulated to committee members so that they may review it. Once reviewed, the report is approved by the chair, deputy chair, and the member of the third party. It will be tabled in the Assembly, and the inquiry will be officially completed. I have to say this even though we've all unanimously voted for this. If members wish to submit a minority report, those members should have it submitted to the committee clerk prior to the end date of March 31, 2017.

Now, is there any other business that we need to discuss?

Mr. Gottfried: I just wanted to really thank all the colleagues here. I think this was a great process. Also, I'd like to thank all the staff: Sarah, Philip, Trafton, Aaron, Leah, and all the other people in the room here. This has been a bit of a gruelling process but, I think, a very satisfying one. So I'd like to have that on record and thank everybody and the chair and deputy chair for your hard work in achieving this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gottfried.

I think it's important to recognize that this was a very ambitious process to start off with. I'm very happy that we've succeeded in our mandate on this as well.

With that being said, a schedule will be dispersed, once agreed on by the House leaders, for estimates, so we should know the next meeting relatively soon.

With that being said, I would request that a member move a motion to adjourn. Member McPherson had the first hand up and moves that we adjourn. All those in favour, please say aye. Excellent. Oh, sorry. All those opposed? Okay. The meeting now stands adjourned.

Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 9:05 p.m.]

