



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 3 — April 2, 2025**

Published under the  
authority of  
The Hon. Todd Goudy  
Speaker



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Thirtieth Legislature**

*Hansard* and other documents of the  
Legislative Assembly are available  
online within hours after each sitting.  
<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/>

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

James Thorsteinson, Chair  
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Tajinder Grewal, Deputy Chair  
Saskatoon University-Sutherland

Kim Breckner  
Saskatoon Riversdale

Sally Housser  
Regina University

Hon. Terry Jenson  
Warman

Darlene Rowden  
Batoche

Kevin Weedmark  
Moosomin-Montmartre



[The committee met at 17:00.]

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm James Thorsteinson. I am the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy. With us here this evening we have Darlene Rowden, Kevin Weedmark, Hon. Terry Jenson, and we have Tajinder Grewal. And sitting in for Kim Breckner is Brent Blakley, and sitting in for Sally Housser we have Erika Ritchie.

Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Water Security Agency and the Ministry of Agriculture. We'll take a half-hour recess at 8 p.m.

**General Revenue Fund  
Water Security Agency  
Vote 87**

**Subvote (WS01)**

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — We'll first consider the estimates for vote 87, Water Security Agency. We'll begin with the consideration of Water Security Agency subvote (WS01).

Minister Harrison is here with his officials from the agency. I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking at the microphone. As a reminder, please do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee.

Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to join the committee today to provide details on the Water Security Agency's planned activities for 2025-26.

I'm joined today by my chief of staff, Jean-Michel Ferre, and senior officials from Water Security Agency, including Shawn Jaques, president and CEO [chief executive officer] of Water Security Agency; David Cooper, vice-president of agriculture services and economic development; John Fahlman, vice-president of infrastructure; Thon Phommavong, vice-president of science and licensing; Terri Kentel-Weinheimer, vice-president of corporate services; Jordan Huber, vice-president of finance; Ali'i Lafontaine, general counsel; Leah Clark, executive director of irrigation and economic development; and Krystal Tendler, executive director of agriculture water management. And my apologies if I mispronounced any one of those names.

Water is a driving force in Canada and Saskatchewan. Water Security Agency is doing great work to manage and protect this precious resource while growing our province. As you know, water plays a major role in Saskatchewan. They are unique in Canada, bringing together the government's core water management responsibilities in one place.

In Saskatchewan, Water Security Agency performs all the province's water-related functions, including effectively managing water supply to ensure the needs of all users are met, protecting water quality by ensuring the more than 750 wastewater treatment plants meet strict effluent guidelines,

ensuring safe drinking water for our citizens by regulating over 600 drinking water treatment plants, safely operating over 70 dams and hundreds of kilometres of related water supply channels, helping to reduce flood and drought damage with dedicated programming, and protecting aquatic habitat by providing easy-to-understand mitigation conditions for work in and around the province.

Water Security Agency represents Saskatchewan on national and international transboundary water issues.

The Water Security Agency is committed to exceptional client service. Since implementing their client services unit, 62 per cent of all calls into their toll-free lines are answered by client services agents. This means their technical specialists are available to help more clients and provide the high-level service our residents expect.

One of the most effective ways that water is helping drive economic growth in Saskatchewan is with the expansion of irrigation across the province. Five years ago, as part of the province's 2030 growth plan, the government set a goal of creating 85,000 new irrigated acres. The target was very ambitious. To date we have added just over 81,000 new irrigated acres, nearly hitting our 10-year target in half the time we predicted.

Water Security Agency is leading the way in developing new projects of varying size across the province. Work continues on the Westside irrigation rehabilitation project. This project is part of the larger Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project and will add up to 100,000 new irrigable acres for Saskatchewan.

Elsewhere, we are looking at opportunities including west of Lake Diefenbaker. The Luck Lake Irrigation District expansion project consists of the Greenbrier, Dunblane, and Luck Lake expansion phases to develop 48,000 acres. This project is led by producers through the Luck Lake Irrigation District. The Government of Saskatchewan is supporting the irrigation district as they work with Farm Credit Canada and the Canada Infrastructure Bank on their project.

Reliable infrastructure is the backbone of effective water management. Whether it's dams and control structures, reservoirs, or conveyance channels, our ability to provide secure and sustainable water resources depends on strategic investments.

Since 2012 Water Security Agency has invested \$306 million into our network of water management structures. This year we are prioritizing projects that enhance system efficiency, reduce losses, and improve climate resilience. Some of these projects include upgrades to the Grant Devine dam spillway to improve safety and efficiency.

Water Security Agency is also completing upgrades to the East Side pump station with a new electrical substation. These upgrades significantly improve reliability for the power and water supply to the M1 canal and the communities and users it supplies downstream. The M1 canal is a 22.5-kilometre-long water supply canal extending from Lake Diefenbaker to Broderick reservoir near Outlook. The canal provides water for

thousands of acres of irrigation, supplies water to six reservoirs for several towns and villages, five potash mines, 13 wetland projects, and Blackstrap Provincial Park.

With the completion of the new substation, Water Security Agency is now able to reliably operate all four pumps at one time if necessary. Water Security Agency is also undertaking regular ongoing maintenance and upgrades at other sites across the province, ensuring our water infrastructure continues to serve the people of this province.

Saskatchewan has nearly half of Canada's arable acres. That's why we take agricultural water management seriously. Recent wetland inventory work confirmed that thanks to the stewardship of Saskatchewan producers, 86 per cent of Saskatchewan wetlands remain undrained, contributing to habitat protection, water quality management, and the strength of our agricultural sector. The recently introduced agricultural water stewardship policy will continue to ensure that Saskatchewan's water resources are managed for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people now and for the future.

Water Security Agency supports both drainage and wetlands. Drainage is an important tool for farmers to manage water on their land, and wetlands are important to our landscape's resiliency. Over the last couple years, Water Security Agency has engaged with more than 80 stakeholders and Indigenous communities to develop a policy that will guide how many more wetlands can be drained and how many should be retained on the landscape. This policy is a part of the agricultural water management program that ensures drainage is done responsibly. The stewardship policy was built for Saskatchewan people by Saskatchewan people and strikes a balance between landscape resiliency and economic development.

The policy provides flexibility in how the retention targets are met. Every farm in Saskatchewan is unique, and the agency will work with farmers to find an option that works for their operation. We are committed to getting this right, and we will be doing ongoing research and monitoring, committing \$1 million over three years to support research, monitoring, and reporting on 10 different indicators to understand and learn.

Regulation is most effective when it is understood, embraced, and integrated into how people operate. That's why we are shifting towards an outcome-based compliance model for small-scale and lower risk projects and activities. Rather than heavily relying on enforcement, we are focusing on education, collaboration, and clear guidance to ensure that developers, landowners, and other regulated entities meet environmental standards. This approach will increase compliance rates, reduce administrative burden, and create a more co-operative regulatory environment. The goal is to protect our water resources while making it easier for stakeholders to do the right thing.

As part of our mandate to support economic growth, quality of life, and environmental well-being, Water Security Agency conducts long-term surface water quality monitoring across Saskatchewan and makes the data available online. In addition to long-term monitoring, Water Security Agency monitors surface water quality to inform decision making in response to emergencies and special projects.

Priority water bodies and structures routinely monitored include five intermittent streams; 10 major rivers; Lake Diefenbaker, Rafferty, and Grant Devine reservoirs; and the Qu'Appelle Lakes. Most of the monitoring is conducted in the southern half of the province to ensure the quality of source water is sufficient to support water use for municipal drinking water treatment, irrigation, recreation, and environment.

Standardized metrics for river health indicate that river health in Saskatchewan ranges from "fair" to "excellent," with an overall watershed score of "good," indicating water quality is protected with only a minor degree of threat or impairment.

Water Security Agency is also committed to continuing to research water quality to ensure ongoing protection of source water and protection of water quality and ecosystem functions in our rivers and lakes. Water Security Agency will continue to monitor and report on the state of water quality and quantity in Saskatchewan.

As we move forward, these initiatives along with others in the broader strategy will define our success in managing water resources for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people. The work we do today lays the foundation that is driving economic growth and supporting growing communities with water resources that are sustainable, adaptable, and reliable.

[17:15]

I look forward to your questions and discussion on how we can continue to advance these priorities together. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor for questions. MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Ritchie.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for those introductory comments. I'll maybe just start by also providing my appreciation to the officials that are here today to provide support to the minister as we conduct these budgetary estimates.

I guess the first thing that I want to start by asking is, we've heard today some further announcements about tariffs from the States, and I'm wondering if you could tell me how you've accounted for the potential threat of tariffs through this budget.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, predominantly 99 per cent of our goods that we use and our work that is done is sourced locally out in the field. So tariffs, the impacts of tariffs would really be pretty light. But I'll ask my deputy minister Shawn to follow up.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Shawn Jaques, president and CEO of Water Security Agency. The bulk of the work that we do or projects that we undertake at WSA [Water Security Agency] are largely engineering work, dirt-moving work, concrete work around the structures that we have. And so all of that material can be procured locally here in Saskatchewan or within Canada.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Okay. Does the Water Security Agency have any current or planned contracts with American companies to

support its work?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So out of a \$40 million budget, less than \$190,000 involves contracts, and those were procured well ahead of the tariff threat. So, Shawn, would you care to comment further?

**Shawn Jaques:** — Yeah, I think, Minister, you've covered it well. Like you said, out of all the infrastructure work that we do — it's a \$40 million budget — there's about less than 190,000 were US [United States] companies.

**Erika Ritchie:** — And could you tell us the nature of these contracts and the duration, the value of them?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask Shawn to go through some detail in those contracts.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Thank you for the question. So like I said, we had six of them. One of them is a contract we had with SurveyMonkey for a value of just over \$20,000, and it was to create, you know, both internal and external surveys for WSA business divisions. We had a contract with Nave Analytics, again just over twenty and a half thousand dollars, and it was used for identifying critical data analysis for irrigation sustainability and assessment.

We had a contract for just under 70,000 for Everbridge incorporated, and it's a web-based mass notification services, a dam safety program for contacting impacted stakeholders if a dam emergency should occur. Then we had one with an individual from the United States on some work that we're doing on an endangered species, bigmouth buffalo fish, and it was research that requires the expertise to collect process . . . identifying fish. Expertise to complete this work doesn't exist in Canada, so the individuals in the US in that contract was about \$20,000.

We have one for hydrometric forecasting of just about 55,000 and it was a pilot that we had focusing on the short-term and seasonal forecasting models on the Souris River Basin. And then we had a subscription with a company called Ground Control Systems for about \$4,000 and it's IT [information technology], SIM [subscriber identification module] cards. It's just an IT product. So when you add up those six, it's just shy of 190,000.

**Erika Ritchie:** — And so as part of that question I was asking sort of, you know, particularly which of those contracts are extending into the current year and what plans are there to source Canadian alternatives?

**Shawn Jaques:** — Okay.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, when we look for contracts to conduct the work, we certainly look for Saskatchewan and then Canadian contracts first before we go outside. So if there's no interest or no availability from Saskatchewan, or Canadian, then we will look outside to the US. And Shawn will have some details here.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Thanks, Minister. Just a little more detail, and to answer your question.

So there's a number of them that will be wrapped up this year, where we won't be renewing. So for example, the Nave Analytics one on the irrigation monitoring, that one will be wrapped up and we won't be renewing. The Everbridge mass notification, that's a three-year contract, so the end date is October 31st, 2027.

The bigmouth buffalo project, that'll wrap up this year. The hydro forecasting, that's a continuing contract. We'll be continuing that one. And then the SIMs, the IT one, that goes to March '26.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you, thank you very much for those responses. So I think, as the minister indicated, that it's currently the practice of the agency to source from domestic vendors as a matter of course. Am I correct in that understanding? I guess I'm just wondering, you know, is there any planned adjustments to the procurement process that the agency is undertaking to enhance and identify domestic suppliers for future contracts? What would that look like?

[17:30]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And yeah, as a normal course, we do source Saskatchewan then Canadian first. And like I previously said, 99 per cent of what we source is already that way, but to further align with the direction of the government, we will continue to look in there. And Shawn will provide some more details about the work we do and where it's sourced.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Thanks, Minister. And yeah, just to further add what the minister's saying, as we mentioned earlier on, a lot of the projects that we do are, you know, engineering work or dirt-moving work. And so the engineering companies we use, they're either Saskatchewan companies or Canadian companies.

If we're doing work at a dam and we need, you know, material aggregate, we can source that here in the province. You know, the contractors moving the dirt, moving the aggregate are Saskatchewan companies. So you know, we're already looking at how we can source that here in our province or at least within Canada.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you for that explanation.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Minister, go ahead.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yeah, just to add, Mr. Chair, you know, economically it's advantageous to source these closer to the project. In most cases, it makes sense to get that as close to the project as possible, which is right here in the province. Thank you.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Okay. I'll move on to some other questions. It's been brought to my attention that presently there is a review under way of *The Environmental Management and Protection Act* and that there are some proposed changes that will impact on the mandate of the Water Security Agency.

I wondered if you could please take some time to provide a summary of what some of those changes are that will affect the agency, and also describe the role that the agency is undertaking as part of that review and public engagement process.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask General Counsel Ali'i Lafontaine to respond. Apologies if I . . .

**Ali'i Lafontaine:** — No, that's fine. Ali'i Lafontaine, general counsel. Thank you for the question. At this time the Water Security Agency is responsible for a narrow scope when it comes to this area. We are being consulted, but at this time they haven't made specific recommendations that would impact how we operate.

Our primary responsibility is under *The Water Security Agency Act*, which is fundamentally where we derive our statutory responsibilities. So this is ongoing, and any proposed changes will be incorporated but will align with our responsibilities under *The Water Security Agency Act*.

**Erika Ritchie:** — I wonder though if you could provide a little more detail on some of the proposed changes that you have been consulted on by the Ministry of Environment that relate to water security.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you. Mr. Chair, with regard to the question, it probably would have been better directed towards the Ministry of Environment. Estimates were held earlier this week and the opportunity would have been presented at that time.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Well with all due respect, Mr. Minister, I'm looking for an answer to a question that pertains directly to water security in terms of the nature of the consultation that your agency has been engaged in. It's my understanding that there are specific elements that have been identified that directly impact on the agency. And so I'm looking for some clarity on those items.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The environmental considerations are still ongoing, and I'll ask Ali'i to comment.

**Ali'i Lafontaine:** — Yeah. So because Environment is primarily responsible to provide the proposed changes, the consultation period with multiple stakeholders is still under way. And so when we do receive specific details as to how it would impact our agency, we can provide that feedback, but that consultation is ongoing.

**Erika Ritchie:** — So the consultation document makes 72 references to wetlands, and the Ministry of Environment has provided a number of responses in this consultation document indicating that the Water Security Agency is developing policy regarding agricultural water management and wetland conservation.

As agricultural drainage is governed by *The Water Security Agency Act*, a more holistic approach to wetlands management may be included in future modifications to this legislation.

And so I guess I would just ask the minister, you know, how it sees its role in maintaining and preserving wetlands as part of its mandate going forward and in light of any changes to *The Environmental Management and Protection Act*.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the environmental management is an environmental policy, so they

have to be accountable for that, and that's in that ministry. If it pertains to water security and our budget, then we'd certainly take care of that.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Right. And I guess it's a situation where there's this overlapping jurisdictional responsibility where you have, you know, water in wetlands. And so there is the policy implications in both Ministry of Environment and within the Water Security Agency. And I think that's where the question comes from, and in particular whether it has to do with any kind of land use considerations, any sort of ministerial or agency work and decisions around how wetlands can be affected.

And I think in particular the ag water stewardship policy is sort of the prime example of where, you know, wetlands are directly affected by policy of your agency to drain wetlands. And so I don't think it's so cut and dry, if you'll excuse the pun. And maybe you could just identify for us, kind of given the status of the policy, if there are going to be changes to EMPA [*The Environmental Management and Protection Act*], how will wetlands be, you know, sort of . . . Where do you sort of see your jurisdictional or legal obligations as part as any discussions around those changes?

[17:45]

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — MLA Ritchie, I think it was made quite clear that this is a bill that is coming forward under Environment. It's not part of the budget estimates that we are looking at here tonight. So I would ask that you would please move on to a different line of questions.

**Erika Ritchie:** — So I did want to ask some questions about the policy that came into effect at the end of January. It obviously is a key aspect of the operational spending line for Water Security. And like I say, I have a few questions around that that maybe sort of touch on this issue a little bit around wetlands. For example, it's my understanding that in the event that wetlands are drained and then put sort of into agricultural production, that there is a question around the legal status of those lands, which according to legislation is deemed Crown land.

Could you please provide some, you know, explanation or sort of what the approach of the ministry would be in those cases where what is part of Crown land now moves into agricultural production?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask Krystal to comment on this.

**Krystal Tendler:** — Thank you. Krystal Tendler, agriculture water management. So at WSA we can't make a unilateral decision on ownership of lands in the province, and so it's a large legal endeavour to work with various different ministries and agencies to look at kind of the legal framework around that.

But what we're interested in is managing the impacts of drainage, regardless of where they're happening or why they're happening. And so we look at managing those impacts to water quality, water quantity, and water habitat as per our WSA legislation.

And so our agriculture water management regulatory program is designed to do that. That program was established back in 2015



with a mission to facilitate responsible drainage in resilient watersheds. And so we take a risk-based approach at that where we look at all types of wetlands in the province, all types of drainage, and ensure that that drainage is being done responsibly and in alignment with our rules and regulations.

**Erika Ritchie:** — That's an interesting approach. Is there any specific legal analysis that backs up or led you to take that approach?

**Ali'i Lafontaine:** — Do appreciate the question. The challenge that we deal with is, because we are a statutory-created entity, we cannot go beyond the obligations and powers that are established in our existing legislation. And even though there are a number of legal analyses that have been presented, we can only align with those responsibilities that are outlined in our legislation.

So when it comes to the details that you're providing, it does require alignment across various ministries that would be impacted by our decision making. But we can only go to the extent that our legislation allows us to.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Well it does sound like there's quite a bit of ambiguity there that you're facing which, you know, does stem from the implementation of a policy or at least has implications for a policy that is going to create more of these kinds of situations where this indeterminate ownership will be in question.

You know, it was mentioned that there is sort of a risk-based approach to how this is being handled. And I would submit that, you know, that the risk is significant in terms of both the obligation of the Crown and the potential for risk or obligations for lands that currently are considered bed and bank of a water body that could now be subject to, you know, adverse effects related to a change in the land use.

And so I appreciate the complexity that you're dealing with, and I guess I would just like to understand a little bit better how you intend to resolve that with your counterparts so that the government is not exposed to undue risk.

[18:00]

**Krystal Tendler:** — Thanks for the question. So we do have common law and statutory obligations that we must oblige to, and so that really was a key component as we were working through policy development along with our stakeholder engagement, along with our research and demonstration. It was understanding those legal obligations, and that provided the foundation for our policy development.

But I do want to touch on the policy that I'm sure that you're referencing — it's a stewardship policy — because that policy isn't a policy that's going to result in the drainage of more wetlands. That's a policy that's providing protection to wetlands, greater protection than has ever existed in Saskatchewan before. And so it's not a drainage policy. It's a part of our ag water management program that is regulating drainage. And so all these pieces come together to manage the risks that may be presented by drainage.

**Erika Ritchie:** — I do think though that there are implications

for the uncertainty that exists around this issue. And you know, whether it's the case that it's promoting or just simply regulating, at the end of the day we still have a situation arising where the ownership comes into question. And so I'm wondering if the agency would be, you know, open to putting this before court to resolve this ambiguity and resolve the issue going forward.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Generally we believe Saskatchewan farmers are the best caretakers of our land and water here in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan farmers are caretakers of 4.6 million acres of wetlands, and they are good stewards of those lands. I'll ask Ali'i to provide some further comment.

**Ali'i Lafontaine:** — Yes, to your question, there have been multiple challenges in court proceedings. However because of the unique and complex landscape of Saskatchewan, it's very difficult to make one determination that would be directly applicable to another fact scenario. And as we review the details of this policy, the intention is to create as much understanding from a wider net, as opposed to narrowing rules to create essentially hard and fast rules that would be applicable to one type of fact scenario.

So court challenges continue to be pursued. However when it comes to our obligation, to engage as many stakeholders as possible and create a broader solution through policy is something that aligns more with our obligations with the Water Security Agency.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Okay. I do have a few more questions on this though. I mean of course no one's disputing, you know, the role of farmers as caretakers of the land, but I think there is a broader public interest here that is in play.

I think also that there are cost implications. Certainly if we see land that is now sort of either being transferred into the ownership — you know, being taxed by the municipal level at a different rate — and basically a transfer of Crown lands over to private landowners, you know, oftentimes corporate entities, then there's definitely cost implications.

There's also issues around the loss of ecosystem services, conservation, conservation implications, as well as, you know . . . We are part of national and international agreements around meeting certain obligations for conservation. All those things start to come into play if now we take, you know, aquatic habitat and now place it into agricultural production. I also forgot to mention of course the climate resiliency implications as well too, when this Crown land is taken out of ecosystem service.

So what I would like to know, in addition to the legal aspects that we've just touched upon, you know, what analysis has the ministry undertaken to understand the consequences or the impacts of these changes in land use of currently Crown-owned land into agricultural production as a result of the drainage policy?

**Krystal Tendler:** — All right. Thanks for the question. Again just want to clarify that the policy that we're talking about today is a stewardship policy. It's not a drainage policy, and so it's designed to ensure that we're being stewards of those Saskatchewan resources, of farmers' land, of our province's

resources.

So the policy will ensure that wetlands remain on the landscape, and that's a part of the design of the policy. And the policy design has gone back many years. We've been working on this — well in this round — since 2019, at which time we started our investigation analysis into some of the questions and considerations that you raised about how does drainage impact habitat, and to climate change, aquatic habitat. All these different things that you mentioned, that's a part of those research and demonstration projects we did.

And so we invested a million dollars and worked with partners all over the province to explore the various different considerations that goes into designing a policy like this.

The other thing that we did, as you know, is we worked with stakeholders and got input about what's going to make sense for the landowners of the province to be able to implement a policy to ensure that it achieved the outcomes.

And so the policy, it's six different outcomes that really capture some of the considerations that you mentioned. So we're looking at habitat. We're looking at water quality, looking at water quantity, but also agricultural economy, agricultural stewardship, and our communities, our rural communities.

And so it's a balancing act, looking at those six different outcomes and ensuring the policy can achieve progress in each of those different areas.

We also now have an ongoing commitment to research and monitoring, and so as we released the new policy in January we made a commitment to continuing to learn more. And so it will be another million dollars invested over the next three years where we'll continue to better understand the implications of drainage and how they can be managed to ensure that we're achieving the outcomes that we designated.

[18:15]

And as a part of that we also have an indicator framework. So we have 10 different indicators that we'll be monitoring through policy implementation to ensure that the policy is doing what it's designed to do over time. Because at the end of the day, we need to be able to do both things. We need to be able to retain wetlands on the landscape to ensure that landscape resiliency, but we've got to keep drainage as a tool for farmers to be able to use. It's critical to the business.

And these aren't big corporate farms. These are family farms, for the majority of the time in Saskatchewan, who are caring for these resources. And it's important that they maintain those tools in the tool box to manage their operations in a way that makes sense for them while helping us achieve those landscape-level outcomes.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. I note that it's rather high level, and I do want to ask if, you know, there is more specific analysis that can be provided with respect to the questions that I was asking.

I think the question around sort of the cost-benefit analysis that

has accompanied the policy work so far is a piece of this that stakeholders are interested in understanding better, and you know, in terms of whether or not there's been scenario analysis done. I mean you talk about there being, you know, wetlands retained on the landscape, but there is significant concern for the amount of, you know, the floor that's been sort of set as part of the policy and the consequences of, you know, that floor being achieved.

And that's specifically where I would like to have a better understanding of those implications. If there are those studies and analyses that have been undertaken, if we could be provided with those.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to reiterate that Water Security Agency has engaged with over 80 stakeholder organizations and Indigenous communities since 2022 in developing this policy. This consultation continues, is ongoing, and we are continuing to engage with all our stakeholders at this time. Krystal, I'll ask you to comment a little further.

**Krystal Tendler:** — Yeah, thanks, Minister. Through the engagement we've been really committed to transparency. And so as a part of that, we've done a lot of analysis that we've made available to the stakeholders, but also they're all publicly posted on our website.

So if you're interested in reviewing those, all of our analyses, including our threshold analysis, our economic analysis that kind of form the foundation of the cost-benefit approach, are all publicly available on our website along with various different studies, as well as copies of the reports from those engagements where we shared that information and got feedback from stakeholders.

So that information is available, but I would jump to add a little bit more details on the floor. You referenced the floor and consideration of kind of how we landed where we did on the floor. And so that floor was based on understanding through the wetland inventory that helped us assess where all the wetlands are in the province, how many of them, and of what types.

And so through that we understood that we have 86 per cent of our wetlands are undrained, but it also helped us understand that 29 per cent of our wetlands exist in areas that are just unlikely to be drained. And so this can be for a number of different reasons, but often it's because they're in provincial parks under WHPA designation, *The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act*, or they're in slope classes or soil types that are unlikely to be drained. And so that data is through the wetland inventory. That report on that is also available on our website that speaks to our methodology in determining that.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Despite what, you know, has just been described or explained, I continue to hear from eminent water experts that they continue to have serious concerns with the policy and the fact that it ignores voluminous scientific evidence that wetland drainage causes profound environmental damages, including many studies summarized by the blue-ribbon panel that was contracted by the Water Security Agency to evaluate the wetlands mitigation policy.

There are concerns that there has been highly misleading and, as stated, factually false information regarding the extent of wetlands and the degree to which they have been damaged by agriculture, the amount of wetlands that can be safely drained, and the ability of their evaluation metrics to actually measure the effects of the policy, and their ability to monitor changes to surface water and remediate the effects.

And so these damages, as the experts go on to say, will include but are not limited to a loss of oxygen from lakes, thereby damaging or collapsing fisheries and reducing biological diversity; recreational damages due to lake nitrification; the reduction of water potability due to increased solute content, including agri-chemicals; and toxic blooms of cyanobacteria or more commonly known as blue-green algae.

I think it's highly concerning that, you know, when we in fact have eminent experts at our world-class public academic institutes here in the province that we are not listening and heeding their warnings and concerns. And I'm wondering if you could please provide an explanation of why that hasn't occurred.

[18:30]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In regards to stakeholders and consultations, we took everyone's perspective into account, and we certainly listened to over 80 stakeholders — experts if you will — in that regard.

In regard to our water quality, I don't think Saskatchewan has anything to be ashamed of. Our water quality is rated from fair to excellent, with an overall water quality score of good. And our water quality is protected with only a minor degree of threat or impairment. So I think our Water Security Agency is doing a fabulous job in this regard. And I commend them for that.

So Krystal, I'll ask you to comment a little.

**Krystal Tendler:** — Sure. Thank you. So I think through this it's really become clear how passionate everyone is about the subject, and that's been really helpful to understand the various different voices and perspectives of the different stakeholders. And I think at the end of the day, we all agree that wetlands are important. They're important to our landscape, they're important to our resiliency, and people care about them. And there's no disagreement there.

I think where we need to find the balance is between . . . how do we achieve those outcomes. There's different ways to get to that same spot. And so if we want to take those six different outcomes, the way I describe it — and I have little kids, so sorry, forgive the jelly bean analogy — but we've got 100 jelly beans. We've got six different buckets. And we need to weigh our different trade-offs between economics, between habitat, between water quality, between communities, and their health. We need to divide those jelly beans up between those six different buckets, and everyone who we talk to and every perspective we get would do it a bit differently. So it's not that we discount any one perspective, but we need to consider a lot of different perspectives.

And so I appreciate that you are hearing from some experts who are concerned. We hear concerns from all different places about

different things, and we need to put those all into perspective of the policy we're trying to build and weigh it with the evidence that we have of Saskatchewan-specific projects that help to inform the policy.

We also need the policy to be practical, and so a huge part of our focus hasn't been about necessarily just getting a nice-looking piece of policy that we can put on our website and walk away from it. It's about getting a policy that's going to be practical for our landowners to implement as a part of their agricultural operations. And so if it wasn't going to be practical, it wasn't going to help us achieve our outcomes. And so we took a lot of time understanding those landowner perspectives, and that was incorporated into the policy design as well.

But at the end of the day, this policy is about holding wetlands on the landscape — wetland retention. And so our focus here is about that. It's not about increasing drainage, it's about how can we still allow producers the ability to manage their water while keeping those wetlands. But we are committed to ongoing monitoring and have the investment as a part of our this-year budget to ensure we're able to do that. And so we're committed to continuing to learn more, and as we learn more we'll do better.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Minister, you wanted to add . . .

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yeah, if you wouldn't mind, Mr. Chair, I just want to say, when I talked about water quality, those aren't Water Security Agency's metrics that were used. They're Environment and Climate Change Canada metrics. So to be fair, our Water Security Agency is doing a very good job to be measured with that kind of a measuring stick. So I'm very proud to say they're doing a fabulous job. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Erika Ritchie:** — I'd like to delve into this a little bit further. You know, I guess part of the concern is that it's important to engage widely and talk to a diverse range of stakeholders in developing policy. There's strong agreement on that.

But I would say two things in response to that, one of them being, you know, when we have water experts whose specialization is studying water quality and land use practices, wetlands, so on and so forth, and they come forward and raise significant concerns about the impacts of this potential policy, then, you know, I think it's important to take heed to those concerns and be transparent about it as well.

And I guess that's one of the things that I have concerns about is that I'm hearing very different things from the Water Security Agency, Mr. Minister, about the effects of this policy and those that researchers, experts in this field are saying about the policy.

So in terms of sort of the scientific underpinnings, there is a wide discrepancy, I would submit, between what I'm hearing here and what I'm hearing from those water experts. And I'd like you to please address that and tell me why there is such a disparity there.

[18:45]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to reiterate to the committee that 86 per cent of the wetlands in our province are undrained, so we know Saskatchewan producers are great stewards of the land. This policy change won't change most

producers' approach to managing water because most producers are already choosing to retain these wetlands on their land. For further comment I'll ask Krystal to provide more detail.

**Krystal Tendler:** — Thank you. Yeah, I think it's an important piece that when we think about what drives producers' decisions to retain wetlands as a part of their operations on their land, there's many different factors. Government regulation is one of those pieces, but there's many different components that are going into those decisions. It's also what's happening in the market. What's the price of canola? That's a part of the decision. What market incentives exist? That's a part of the consideration. Education and outreach is a part of it.

And so we've made a commitment to looking at this from various different pieces, not just from a policy and regulatory approach. But this policy does establish what we consider kind of a bumper pad of we have 86 per cent of wetlands on our landscape still without a policy that said producers had to keep them. They made that choice to keep them over the last 100 years because it made sense. And so this policy is now proactively establishing a bumper pad that ensures that that number stays in a positive range that allows us to achieve our outcomes.

But we know these various other factors also influence those decisions, and so we're also investing in extension as a part of our 2025-2026 budget. We've reaffirmed our commitment to agricultural extension where we're working with producers to help them understand agriculture water management and how to do that responsibly.

I do understand that there are some misconceptions about some of our data, and that is understandable. I appreciate that because some of this data is new. This wetland inventory that serves as a foundation for many of our decisions was just established over the last number of years, and it's a newer data set, a larger data set than has ever been available before. So the results of that, the determinations that are coming out of that are different from the common narrative that had always been the case in Saskatchewan. And it's just, before we didn't have the data that we have now, so we've learned more, and we're able to make more informed decisions from a policy perspective.

Some of the misconceptions that we hear, things like the starting point. I've heard kind of the conversations that, you know, we're only looking at wetland loss over the last 20, 30 years, and that's not true. Through the wetland inventory we're actually able to assess loss since the time of European settle-ization. And so the data set is pretty robust.

We also hear misconceptions that, you know, we're calling lakes a part of our 86 per cent classification and that's why the number's so high; it's because we're thinking about all the big lakes. Again, that's not true. Lakes are considered separately. The 86 per cent wetlands undrained is just considering the pothole wetlands, not considering the northern wetlands.

The final misconception we often hear is the difference between, are we counting up the wetlands or are we considering their area. And so we have chosen to consider the area of wetlands retained versus the count. And that just means that, you know, a small wetland the size of this room is considered differently than a wetland the size of this Wascana Park. They're just a different

size. They provide different habitat benefits and so forth.

And so we are considering area when we talk about 86 per cent intact. And there is misconceptions around that, and we are committed to continuing to provide education and information sharing to build understanding of the data set so we can all be working from the same playing field when we're having conversations about best policy approaches to achieve some of these shared outcomes we have with all of our stakeholders.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you. So you know, you've mentioned these misconceptions, and I would suggest that, you know, dealing with experts whose livelihoods and careers are based on understanding the science, you know, take more than just a casual interest in the facets of the policy and what it means. And I think to characterize it as misconception is, you know, characterizing and not really giving the due credence to these very legitimate concerns that we are hearing from experts.

My question to the minister, you know, was regarding the disparity between what your agency is communicating and professing in terms of the impacts of the policy, the extent of the current level of drainage, and how the policy will be implemented going forward. And I haven't heard anything so far that really addresses that current disparity between what is in the scientific registries and the information and position that your agency has been taking.

And I'll maybe just give one example here. There is a paper that has been published by faculty from the University of Regina. It's the "Aquatic deoxygenation as a planetary boundary and key regulator of earth system stability" article in *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. And this paper suggests that many lakes in the northern hemisphere are losing oxygen due to a combination of warmer water and nutrient pollution.

Southern Saskatchewan has some of the most impacted lakes on the planet and the highest rates of oxygen loss, reflecting the above-average rates of atmospheric warming and widespread nutrient pollution. They argue that natural feedbacks in aquatic ecosystems will intensify oxygen loss, leading to fundamental changes in other earth parameters such as climate systems, nutrient biogeochemistry, biodiversity, and utility of water resources for humans.

Of note, they say, is that the Water Security Agency wetlands drainage program will greatly increase the rate of oxygen loss as nutrients normally held within isolated wetlands will be joined into natural drainage systems leading to all prairie lakes. And as oxygen is lost, fisheries are compromised and historical nutrients are released from sediments to re-pollute surface waters and develop blooms of toxic algae.

And so I've included that as just one example of several where we see significant concern listing significant impacts of policies that while, you know, are intended to regulate drainage, I would submit haven't got the balance right. And these are the sorts of disparities where I don't think it's necessarily a . . . Well I'm understating my point, but this is more than just a misconception. I think this is a fundamental disagreement between the outcomes, as you call them, that this policy will lead to and what the science is currently telling us is already in play and will continue to be in play unless, you know, some other kind of action is taken.

And so I would just like you to maybe respond to that and, more particularly, tell me how you intend to resolve these contradictions and work with scientists, as has been recommended by the Provincial Auditor, you know, to work with our local experts in these areas to ensure that we get this policy right.

[19:00]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask the member for some clarifying on what exactly discrepancies she's referring to. And then I'd just ask, are you thinking that we should ban all forms of drainage? Are you leaning towards that?

**Erika Ritchie:** — So I've asked a question about the disparity between the scientific research and work that was put forward by a blue-ribbon panel to the Water Security Agency that outlined concerns around the effects of the policy. And then I've shared some information about just an example of some research that has looked at oxygen levels in lakes and how said policy is expected to exacerbate an existing situation.

And so that is where I see the discrepancy between a policy that's put forward that is suggested to be sort of a balance of all factors and, you know, that there's going to be a risk management approach that is going to provide a reasonable level of protection to aquatic environments and water quality. That's the discrepancy I'm referring to, and that's where I hear repeatedly from the academic community that their concerns have gone unheeded, that their recommendations have been ignored, that the policy does not reflect the advice that they have given. And so those concerns remain outstanding.

And then of course as things continue on, there's concern particularly with a changing climate that, you know, the situation will only get worse. And that all sort of flies in the face of other commitments that have been made for protecting habitat, you know, agreements at the national and international level as well.

It does not square that this policy is going to be able to achieve all those objectives, and so that's why I'm asking the question. What is being done to resolve those disparities and ensure that the advice and recommendations of water experts that we have here at global, leading institutions in the province are given full consideration moving forward?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just because policy isn't exactly how they want it, doesn't mean that they weren't heard or valued. We don't disagree that we need to pay attention to impacts. We don't think we need to ban drainage to do that. Experts that you're referring to, would their position be to ban draining? And would you agree with that position? We need to mitigate impacts and manage risks while still allowing agriculture to thrive. And I'll ask my deputy minister to comment.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Yeah. Thank you, Minister. I'd maybe just like to add a few comments to what the minister has already said. You know, there are a lot of water experts that we deal with, and we do work with all of them. You know, even in my own agency, the Water Security Agency, we have a whole division called science and licensing that employs people that have Ph.D.s [Doctor of Philosophy] in water quality, have spent their careers

working on water quality. And you know, we have people that have education in studying water, hydrology. So we do have a full team of experts at WSA.

We also do work closely with academics. I have regular interaction with Corinne Schuster-Wallace, the executive director of the Global Institute for Water Security. We have collaborated with them. We've exchanged, you know, meetings. We've exchanged information. And you know, really as the minister said, we are committed to the research.

That's why in our most recent budget we've committed a million dollars for ongoing study to look at the impacts of water management. And one in particular we are going to be funding is a research project at the Buffalo Pound water treatment plant. And I'll maybe just get Krystal to talk a little bit more about that project and anything else she might want to add.

**Krystal Tendler:** — Yeah, sure. I think it's a really good example of where concerns were raised to us about a water body, so Buffalo Pound Lake, and we were able to acknowledge those concerns. It's obviously a very important drinking water source for many people in Saskatchewan and particularly the cities of Regina and Moose Jaw. So we took those concerns seriously, and we worked with various different stakeholders to design a research project that will help us understand what's going on.

And so we need to assess various different factors, and we're embarking upon a \$300,000 project, starting here any day now as runoff is starting, to assess water quality and flows into Buffalo Pound Lake from four different sites. That will help us understand the various different implications that we need to consider into managing that important water body.

[19:15]

And so that project is just one example of how we take concerns. We think about it through. We don't jump to conclusions, but we work in a collaborative way to assess and respond to and manage potential impacts.

**Erika Ritchie:** — So I mean, I guess I would just restate that, you know, it's highly concerning that peer-reviewed, scientific data . . .

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Excuse me, Ms. Ritchie. This isn't the forum to debate policy. This is the place where we look at the estimates of the budget, not debate specific policy. So if I could ask you to move on.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Yes. And I think where we're focused right now is the part of the budget that funds the program that implements the policy around agricultural water stewardship here in the province. And so the work of those officials within the Water Security Agency, whose salaries are paid through these budget lines and results in the implementation of the said policies, is what my questions are related to.

And you know, the concern that if . . . When we have unmitigated drainage contributing to oxygen loss where fisheries are compromised and nutrients are released from sediments that re-pollute surface water and develop blooms of toxic algae, I mean obviously that is highly concerning and obviously fits within the

purview of the Water Security Agency's mandate. And I would say that . . .

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Ms. Ritchie, you are bringing things forward . . . This is not about the budget. It's not about WSA officials. That is a study that was performed. If you could bring it back, that would be appreciated.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Right. Right, yeah. The research is in relation to the underpinnings of the policy that was developed and the information that was or was not considered in its development. But I would just, in response to the minister's question, point out that the policy . . . And this is a concern that I have heard from stakeholders — you know, a very deep concern — is the fact that there is, as you know, no-net-loss component to the policy.

And so no one is suggesting that, you know, drainage not occur. It's the manner in which drainage occurs. It's a question of the design of the policy and what's in it, what's not in it, and how that also reflects what's happening in neighbouring jurisdictions such as Manitoba and Alberta, where they have a no-net-loss policy — you know, how it also reflects the best practice by other jurisdictions.

And then the other thing that it doesn't include either is any type of a compensation component too. And so that's where, you know, I would just say in response to your question, those are some aspects of the policy that are limiting.

And I'm wondering if you could speak to both why it is that this policy in its final form did not include either of these aspects, in the face of the scientific studies in peer-reviewed journals which indicate that there are significant threats being posed to the natural environment, to water environments of which your agency is responsible for protecting.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We did look at best practice, but for our neighbours — Alberta, Manitoba — have no-net-loss policies, which is in fact a drainage ban. But they have seen a 60 to 70 per cent loss. We've only seen a 14 per cent loss, and we believe we will continue to see wetlands as an important part of our landscape.

In regards to compensation, through engagement with our landowners, very few farmers are asking for compensation to be good stewards. They do it anyways. I'll ask Krystal to add some further comment.

**Krystal Tendler:** — I just wanted to add a few comments around your note about unmitigated drainage having impacts. And so our drainage approval process, through the agriculture water management program, is designed to look at all the different potential impacts that could occur from drainage and apply mitigation conditions to ensure that that unmitigated drainage you reference isn't happening. We want to see responsible drainage.

And so through our ag water management program and the change that it saw in 2015, we're seeing a 13-times increase in the number of quarter sections that are coming into the compliance with that mitigated state that we're looking for, so responsible drainage.

And so what that looks like is we're seeing drainage projects now with flow controls that are managing the flow at which, and the speed at which, water is moving. They're also managing to make sure nutrients are staying in place, not going downstream. They're looking at habitat and how do we make sure we're doing work at the right time to protect habitat. They're looking at various different factors, ensuring we're mitigating those things.

And so that's what a drainage approval does, and that's why we're working with our team through the agriculture water management branch to achieve those approvals.

**Erika Ritchie:** — According to the government's climate resilience report 2024, multiple systems need to be strengthened to enhance the resilience of the province to the effects of a changing climate, and this includes the ability of our natural systems, including water, to adapt and thrive in a changing environment.

It goes on to say that responsible management of our natural resources sustains habitat for plants and animals while also providing ecological goods and services. You know, as is well known and understood, wetlands store carbon in the form of methane.

And I'm wondering if you could tell me what impact the ag water stewardship policy is expected to have on the government's climate resilience strategy as it's stated above.

[19:30]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to reiterate that wetlands are important to resiliency. The stewardship policy provides the greatest protection for wetlands that Saskatchewan has ever had.

**Erika Ritchie:** — And is that the response? Okay, so if that's the case, do you feel it goes far enough?

**Shawn Jaques:** — So you know, maybe just a couple comments I'd make. You know, the stewardship policy that we implemented back in January is really just one component to that resiliency. There are a lot of other parts of the business that we have at WSA, you know, that support that.

And one of them that I think about is, you know, the management of reservoirs or that important storage of water. So making sure that, you know, there's room in those reservoirs in years when there's excess moisture that we can capture that and hold it to be used in years when there isn't enough water. Managing the 72 dams that we have across the province to help protect against, you know, drought or floods.

You know, I think back in the last couple years where it's been extremely dry. We work closely with our neighbouring provinces, both Alberta and Manitoba. And to think about the situation Alberta was in where their reservoirs were low, they were running into problems not having enough water for communities, whereas how we were operating our structure and having, you know, Lake Diefenbaker — probably one of the gems of this province — being able to store all that water. We managed it such keeping the water higher than we normally would have on the dry years to make sure we had water that could

be used in, you know, in the dry years.

So I think that's also part of resiliency, you know, investing in irrigation. You know, in years when producers don't get enough natural precipitation, supplementing that with water from Lake Diefenbaker and other reservoirs.

Working with our communities, you know, there are a number of communities that we helped to implement drought preparedness plans for. That's also part of resiliency. Working, you know, with the federal government — I've had the opportunity to appear twice before a House of Commons committee on the environment to talk about resiliency.

You know, like I mentioned, working with our prairie provinces and then also working with international commissions on water management. So those are all, I think, components of, you know, what WSA does to help with the climate resiliency.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Yes, thank you very much for that response. I don't think it addresses the issue sort of at the front end of the problem where drainage of wetlands contributes greenhouse gases, and you know, contributes overall to the kinds of responses that you just mentioned. And I think it's incumbent on all jurisdictions and all ministries, and as per your own *Prairie Resilience* report, to be ensuring that we're focused on, you know, mitigation of emissions to limit the amount of response we need to have on the back end. It's like, you know, an ounce of prevention is a pound of cure, right.

But nevertheless I will move on. Local water governance experts have criticized the ag water stewardship policy as a narrow and fragmented policy that fails to consider the full range of aspects and interactions water has in ecological systems and in a socio-economic context, contributing to conflicts between stakeholders with divergent interests. And about four years ago, the budget removed funding for regional watersheds.

Could you please explain to me how, through this budget this year, how other crucial stakeholders concerned about or directly affected by local drainage networks on a larger watershed level are engaged in decision making?

[19:45]

**Krystal Tendler:** — Thanks for the question. So we do absolutely agree that that watershed level collaboration is critical to responsible water management. It's actually why we identified Saskatchewan communities as one of our six outcomes in our stewardship policy. Because it's about that collaboration across diverse stakeholders within local regions that makes the best outcomes.

And so you're right that a few years ago, there was some changes to watershed stewardship groups in the province. Most of them amalgamated under the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds that became kind of a provincial body being able to deliver services across the province. They do have districts that still have district-level boards that provide some of those same services they always have. And they've been incredibly successful in securing federal funding to deliver new programming to producers across the province that still, you know, look at some of those same considerations around

watershed services.

And we do continue to work with Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds on various different projects. And in fact the Buffalo Pound one I mentioned earlier, they're actually supporting a lot of the testing and monitoring that's going on over the next couple of months. And so we continue to collaborate with them where it makes sense.

But there's many other ways that we support kind of that stakeholder relationships, the working between landowners that's important to those good project designs. And one example of that is the qualified person program. And so qualified persons are defined in our legislation as consultants that can support in designing and developing responsible water management projects. And a big part of that job is working with landowners to get kind of a consensus agreement around different water management projects.

We have an Agricultural Water Management Fund that will provide — as of, I think announced maybe today, rolled out; maybe tomorrow — that will provide support to producers who are hiring those qualified persons to work on their projects. But also through the Agricultural Water Management Fund, mediation services are eligible for support. And so if there is conflict, they can access 100 per cent reimbursement for mediation support that they engage to resolve conflicts at the local level where we think they're best resolved.

A final thing I want to touch on is our support for the Saskatchewan Conservation and Development Association, the SCDA. They're an organization that is an umbrella for watershed association boards, so those are legislated entities who operate regionally to oversee watershed level, water management issues. And so we've committed \$800,000 through 2025 to the Saskatchewan Conservation and Development Association for them to continue to provide really important services to their membership.

**Erika Ritchie:** — I believe in your opening remarks, Mr. Minister, you mentioned money for some irrigation projects, small irrigation projects. I wondered if you could provide some more detail on where those projects are planned to be implemented over the course of the next year.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Thanks for the question, Ms. Ritchie. So you know, in addition to what the minister commented in his opening comments, some of the other areas . . . We are seeing irrigation interest across Saskatchewan, many different parts of the province. So we saw expansion at the SSEWS [Saskatoon south east water supply] irrigation expansion. That's on the Saskatoon south east water supply. That was 15,000-plus acres. We have interest, producers that want to look at irrigation off the North Saskatchewan River. There was, in addition to Luck Lake, was the Elbow east expansion.

And what's really positive about the Luck Lake project is that's a collaboration amongst producers. Producers are driving that, that want to expand irrigation. It's producer driven. Another example of that, as I said, is the Elbow east. The Riverhurst Irrigation District, they want to expand as well. That's potentially 23,000 acres. The Lake Diefenbaker area study, we're looking at, where can we expand irrigation around Lake Diefenbaker? And

there's also some work that we've been doing in the Swift Current basin as well.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Thank you for that detailed list. Appreciate that. And then I wanted to also ask about the channel clearing program, and if you could provide us with some details on the plan for the coming year.

**Shawn Jaques:** — Thanks for the question, Ms. Ritchie. So the channel clearing program has been in place for a number of years. WSA, we budget a million dollars a year for the program. And so for example in '23-24 we paid out \$892,000 under that program, and in '24-25 it's 871,000.

But a little bit about the program. It's a program where we provide 50 per cent funding with either a producer or small, local governments on projects. Producers can receive up to a maximum of \$50,000, and small municipalities or group applications can receive up to ninety-nine and a half thousand dollars.

**Erika Ritchie:** — So it's basically a sort of applicant-driven process, that's where the channel clearing occurs?

**Shawn Jaques:** — Yeah, that's correct. You know, we've seen some smaller communities that have trouble, you know, with a . . . There could be a drainage or a waterway in their community that's grown in and they need help with it. They just don't have the resources to do it themselves, and this program helps provide some of that funding to be able to help them manage water in their communities.

**Erika Ritchie:** — I think we're coming full circle on this one though unfortunately. Is there a requirement for proof of a permit to drain before those amounts are disbursed?

**Shawn Jaques:** — Just to clarify a couple of points though, this isn't about drainage. So it can only be done on approved projects, so like an approved C&D [conservation and development] project. And it's also removing debris on systems that aren't drainage projects.

Oh, and then I should clarify for '25-26 the funding will be 700,000.

**Erika Ritchie:** — Okay. Thank you for that response.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — We are basically right up against the clock here. So having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Water Security Agency. Mr. Minister, do you have any final comments?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to thank my officials with the Water Security Agency for their hard work and dedication and the good work they put forward. I'd also like to thank the committee for their time tonight. Appreciate all the questions and their dedication to their role on this committee as well.

I also want to thank Hansard and the Clerks here tonight. Appreciate the time they commit to getting this logged and in the books, so to speak. And they're probably overtime tonight here,

so I truly thank you for your time. And once again thanks to the committee for their time as well. Thank you.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. MLA Ritchie, do you have any final comments?

**Erika Ritchie:** — Yes. Thank you so much. I just want to take a moment again to thank all of the officials for being present here today. I know that the president is someone that I bump into regularly in the community at various events, so it's always nice to see you again here along with your officials and the minister.

I want to thank the committee and of course Hansard for their work this evening, and the Clerks-at-the-Table that have been managing these proceedings. And to the Chair as well, thank you so much.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Well thank you very much. Thank you to the minister. Thank you to all the officials who joined us here this evening. This committee will now stand in recess until 8:30 p.m.

[The committee recessed from 19:58 until 20:34.]

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Welcome back, everybody. Thanks for bearing with us while we had a few technical difficulties. For the second session of the Economy Committee meeting here tonight, we have Sean Wilson checking in for Mr. Jenson. We have Carla Beck sitting in for Sally Houser, and Trent Wotherspoon sitting in for Kim Breckner.

### General Revenue Fund Agriculture Vote 1

#### Subvote (AG01)

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — We will now consider the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Agriculture. We will begin with Vote 1, Agriculture, central management and services, subvote (AG01). Minister Harrison is here with officials from the ministry. I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking at the microphone. As a reminder, please do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee.

Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the 2025-26 Ministry of Agriculture estimates.

The officials joining me here today include Jean-Michel Ferre, chief of staff; Bill Greuel, deputy minister; Penny McCall, assistant deputy minister, regulatory and innovation; Sharla Hordenchuk, assistant deputy minister, field operations; Rob Pentland, executive director, corporate services branch; Amanda Sich, executive director, policy branch; Kim McLean, director, board governance unit; Jeff Morrow, president and CEO, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation; Lorelei Hulston, vice-president of operations, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance



Corporation; Warren Ames, executive director of AgriStability, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation; and Christine Virostek, executive director, finance and accounting, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. And I apologize if I butchered anyone's names too badly.

I appreciate this opportunity to talk about what is ahead for the year and to hear questions from you as well.

This past year we saw the agricultural industry continue to demonstrate its resilience and strength. As you know, the agriculture industry is foundational to Saskatchewan's Growth Plan, with several 2030 targets focused on agriculture. One target includes increasing Saskatchewan's value-added agriculture revenue to \$10 billion by 2030. We are on track to meet that goal. Our sector is one of the fastest growing in Canada, with annual revenue that has more than doubled since 2012 from \$3.5 billion to an estimated \$7.9 billion in 2023-24.

The province is also on track to achieve the growth plan target of increasing crop production to 45 million metric tonnes by 2030. Producers have harvested a crop of more than 35.5 million tonnes in 2024, an impressive feat given some of the dry conditions this past growing season. This is a 7.8 per cent increase year over year, and a 4 per cent increase above the five-year average.

This continued success reflects positively on Saskatchewan's agriculture sector, providing evidence of the global demand for the high-quality agricultural products our province consistently delivers. Staying competitive, staying sustainable, and staying profitable are fundamental to our agriculture industry here in Saskatchewan.

We are focused on supporting the resiliency of the sector, which is foundational to a resilient economy in Saskatchewan. We know there are challenges ahead with the US threatening and China imposing tariffs on our industry and the resulting market volatility currently top of mind for all of us here. Saskatchewan producers are facing these tariff uncertainties just as seeding begins.

We are actively engaging with our industry stakeholders to better understand the impact of these actions and to discuss ways to mitigate the impacts. Our stakeholders understand that we are in a challenging time and place in national and international politics. They've also told us that they appreciate the work we are doing in international and national trade missions to defend our industry and find new markets.

There is a lot of uncertainty on what the impacts will be. The countries imposing them have been erratic and unpredictable. These unknowns made it extremely challenging to develop our budget this year. I know that some other provinces have included contingencies for tariffs in their budget; however we know that these contingencies are not surpluses that are set aside. They simply increase the deficits that will already be funded by borrowing. And we believe there are currently still too many uncertainties to make any amount of contingency planning at this time realistic. Of course we remain committed to collaborating with our federal counterparts in Ottawa to resolve these issues as quickly as possible.

Ultimately we want to ensure our industry continues to be

supported so that it can remain competitive. Towards that, we also are committed to further diversifying and focusing our engagement with the 130 countries around the world our agriculture sector does business with. We have a strong sector that is no stranger to challenges, and I am hopeful that together with our valued producers, ranchers, and agribusinesses across Saskatchewan, we will work together to meet these challenges.

And now on to this year's budget. The 2025-26 agriculture budget is a record \$625 million, an increase of \$54.6 million from last year's budget. The budget includes \$483.8 million to continue funding a strong existing suite of business risk management programs: crop insurance, AgriStability, livestock price insurance, and the wildlife damage compensation and prevention programs. These programs are our producers' first and best line of defence to mitigate risk within their operation.

Over the last four years, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation programs provided approximately \$7 billion in claims directly to Saskatchewan producers. Through strong producer participation, government cost-sharing, and a sound premium, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation has adequate reserves to provide financial support to producers through their crop insurance claim payments.

A continued approach to long-term sustainability, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation proactively manages funds with a target to rebuild the surplus as there will be loss years in the future. Work continues developing future opportunities to enhance support for the livestock sector. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation is evaluating new remote sensing technologies to measure soil moisture and plant growth to evaluate potential improvements to forage and pasture insurance. This focus will ensure forage insurance is relevant and accessible in Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan livestock producers.

As we currently face all types of uncertainty and market disruptions, the nature of the AgriStability program makes it well suited to support Saskatchewan producers who may be impacted by tariffs. As a margin-based program, AgriStability responds when a producer's profitability is impacted by factors including rising costs and declining market prices.

The AgriStability program responds when there is a significant reduction in the profitability of the whole farm. Coverage is personalized for each farm operation by using historical information based on income tax and supplementary information.

Saskatchewan Crop Insurance plays a vital role in the government's strategic direction for agriculture by providing strong risk management programs to Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers, so Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers can be innovative while remaining competitive and successful.

This year's budget once again allocates \$89.4 million for the five-year federal-provincial Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, otherwise known as SCAP, to continue to deliver on our investment in priority areas to help ensure producers remain competitive and profitable. We are in our third year of this partnership, and we anticipate seeing a large volume of applications again in 2025-26.

[20:45]

Popular programs include the farm and ranch water infrastructure program to develop sustainable water resources, the resilient agricultural landscape program to increase resiliency of agricultural land, and the animal health and biosecurity program. This funding supports a wide range of initiatives: innovative work on pest biosecurity, disease surveillance, and invasive weeds; research to develop solutions to new emerging problems; continued support for value-added processing; and farm safety research.

The ministry's core operating budget for '25-26 including salaries and FTEs [full-time equivalent] remains largely unchanged at \$50 million. Agriculture research remains a top priority in Saskatchewan, and this budget invests \$37 million in research to help producers stay competitive and profitable in international markets. This funding will support our research partners and the world-class research institutions in this province.

Investing in research is one of the smartest investments we can make. It helps our agriculture sector stay competitive and able to respond to future challenges and opportunities. Our investment includes continued efforts through the Agriculture Development Fund and the strategic research initiative. Over the last five years we have invested almost \$166 million in key personnel at our crop and livestock research facilities, in research chairs to advance strategic priorities, and in research projects that demonstrate innovative technologies to producers and agronomists at the local level.

We know research is what keeps our producers on the leading edge of industry. This includes leading the way in sustainable agriculture. A comprehensive study released in 2024 by the Global Institute for Food Security found Saskatchewan crop production to be more sustainable than that of our global competitors.

These results show that Saskatchewan's production of five major field crops have some of the smallest carbon footprints you'll find among any competing jurisdictions. Our footprint ranges from 67 per cent smaller for canola and 130 per cent smaller for lentils. The institute is now leading work to compare the carbon footprint of Western Canadian beef production to international competitors. You'll hear more about this in the coming year.

With this budget we are once again providing support through industry grants. We are pleased to be able to assist organizations and events that help drive the current and future success of the industry. This includes a variety of activities throughout the year, from conferences to shows such as Canadian Western Agribition, Canada's Farm Show, and the Western Canadian Crop Production Show. These events are important to producers to help our industry continue to grow and advance as we work towards achieving our growth goals for agriculture.

Feedback from our producers also remains important to us. This year, after reviewing feedback from producers, we have revised the grazing rate formula. The amended formula will offer relief to producers renting Crown land and contribute to affordability and stability for the livestock sector in the face of rising production costs. The new rate provides more predictability for producers and uses price averaging for cattle marketed between

October 1st to November 30th of the five preceding years. And to ensure rates are less vulnerable to fluctuations over those years, we have implemented a 20 per cent cap on any annual rental rate increases.

As Agriculture minister and as a cow-calf producer myself, I have a first-hand view of the great work taking place in this industry. We are fortunate to be able to rely on our agriculture producers to help us meet our growth plan targets for 2030. They are the best in the world at what they do, and in many ways they are doing it more sustainably than anyone else.

It is my privilege to introduce this agriculture budget that will continue to support this key economic sector in Saskatchewan. Thank you for the time today, and I look forward to your questions.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor for questions. MLA Beck.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. And I just want to say quickly but sincerely off the top, thank you to all the officials that have joined you here today. I know there's a lot of preparation that goes into this in a normal year, and this certainly is not a normal year. So I really appreciate your work and your attendance here today. Thank you to the committee members and the Chair, folks at Hansard, and my colleagues.

I'm going to keep my comments off the top fairly brief, but I think it's worth mentioning the day that we find ourselves here in committee. And you know, Minister, you mentioned off the top how important agriculture is to this province and how incredibly proud we all are of the innovation that has come out of Saskatchewan year after year and also incredibly proud of the resilience of the industry. I think some years we wish there was a little less need for that resilience, but it's there regardless.

We're incredibly proud of not only what we produce but how we produce it. And we certainly have some questions tonight, but all towards that goal of ensuring that we do our part here to set those producers, those ranchers, those ag businesses up for success.

So a few questions perhaps. Or perhaps I'll turn it over to Trent to see if he's got any opening comments. Then we'll get into questions. Okay, we're going to start straight into it. Okay.

Of course today . . . and, Minister, you mentioned it off the top, the difficulty predicting. There are a lot of variables in agriculture in any given year, this year especially the case. Liberation day came today and we didn't see any additional tariffs from the US, but you know, that volatility remains. And even the threat of those tariffs certainly had impacts in agriculture, price volatility, and many other things.

We also do have, not as a hypothetical, but we have the Chinese tariffs on canola, oil, meal, pork. And I'm just wondering off the top, have those tariffs been accounted for in this budget or have you done any scenarios about what the potential impact of those tariffs could be over, you know, a three-month, six-month, one-year period?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, in regards

to engagement and being accountable, we've fully engaged with our producer groups, Sask Oilseeds, the crushing industry itself. Those impacts, you know, remain to be fully comprehended, but they're fully aware. We're pretty early in this tariff game.

I've engaged with both minister MacAulay at the federal level and now Minister Blois, also at the federal level. And he assures me he will take my concerns to cabinet. The question of the federal government engaging . . . Of course, politics right now on the federal level is kind of on pause while they campaign, and I look forward to the next cabinet, the next prime minister, the next minister of Agriculture to fully engage with China and get to the bottom of these counter-tariffs as a result of the Liberal-NDP [New Democratic Party] coalition that implemented the EV [electric vehicle] tax in the first place.

And my predecessor wrote the minister at the time about the potential of counter-tariffs and warned him that we would see this. And it came not as soon as we expected, but it still came. And we need the federal government to engage.

I'm going to ask my deputy minister, Bill, to provide some additional comment.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yes. Yes, thanks, Minister. I'm Bill Greuel, deputy minister of Agriculture. As was stated in the question, there's a lot of questions about the variables, and in order to account for the variables and the impact of tariffs, we really need to understand three things. It's the product that's being tariffed, the value of the tariff, and the duration of the tariff.

And unfortunately in the situation that we're in today, we don't have the answer to all of those variables because, as you well know, what's happening in the canola sector is dependent on two major markets, the United States and China, which account for about 90 per cent of our export market. So 100 per cent tariff on meal in China essentially closes that market. And you know, if there was to be additional tariffs on canola meal into the US it would make that market very unattractive as well.

So it's very difficult at the time to assess the impact of it. But as the minister stated, we've had extensive consultation with the canola crush sector. They're very aware of this, and we're continuing to have conversations with them about the impact of this and the implications of it should the tariffs with that third variable, the duration of which take longer than is expected.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you for that. This is not what I want to do tonight. I think there are some questions out there that need to be answered, but there are some things that I'm not going to let go.

This tariff was signalled back in August of last year. Regardless of who's going to be the prime minister after this election, we would expect them to engage fully to have these tariffs removed. I hope that the minister will continue, regardless of who's in power, to take that same message because this was a tariff that was called for not just by one party, by leaders . . . Actually it was Pierre Poilievre who initially was calling for this tariff when the Americans put their tariff in. So if you want to go there, I'm not sure that's what people at home, who have very real questions, want to talk about tonight.

So my question next is, in the short term, obviously there are

already impacts. And again, I thank you for . . . to the deputy minister, for the thoughtful response. We've talked to producers, canola crush, the oilseeds folks. And the impacts, although the tariffs went in in March, they were already realizing impacts before that. Is there anything in the short term for support for that industry to ride out some of this volatility until we have a prime minister installed who can turn this tariff around?

[21:00]

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — I would just like to remind officials to not touch the microphones, please.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yes, thank you for that. I'd just maybe speak a little bit to the short-term and immediate actions that it is that we're taking. And of course as a provincial government we're dealing with the federal government on review of business risk management programming as the first line of defence for producers.

But in addition to that we've taken a number of steps in the short term to try to insulate the sector against the compounding effects of tariffs, and that includes support for targeted countermeasures but not support for export tariffs.

We've done a lot of engagement with US government officials at all levels. In February the minister and I attended the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, where we had an opportunity to meet with a number of state legislators and talk about the impacts of tariffs in the US, not only on the Canadian economy but more importantly on US economies and what's happening there. And very good support and understanding from US legislators about the issues. So I think this idea of continuous engagement, not only with legislators in the US but also a number of Canadian and US commodity organizations that we met with in Washington as well.

We've also done a lot of work on the idea of trade diversification. The minister and I also in February took a trade mission to India and the United Arab Emirates. India was of course focused on trade-related issues in pulse crops. But that's an extremely important export market for us. But the trip to the United Arab Emirates was really looking at canola diversification strategies in the Middle East and North Africa region as well.

And then I think the final measure, and the minister can speak to this as well, was the recent removal of the carbon tax to make sure that we've got a resilient and robust agricultural economy that can handle some of the issues and the economic shock that will come with tariffs. So I do believe we've taken a number of immediate steps to help strengthen the agriculture economy in the face of the tariffs.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Minister, do you have some comments?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yeah, just going to follow up on Bill's comment there. The removal of the carbon tax was huge for our Saskatchewan producers. It cannot be understated. They were fighting tooth and nail to get fuel removed for grain drying, and that fell on very deaf ears. So removing it entirely was a huge, huge win for our Saskatchewan producers.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you for the answer. You mentioned the

canola diversification, and certainly this has had an impact on canola crush, an emerging industry here in the province. We've seen projects put on pause. Are there efforts towards providing supports to see those value-added industries re-emerge, have some stability in light of the volatility and the stated purpose or the stated goal of Donald Trump to move a lot of production, a lot of those investments, a lot of those jobs south of the border?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly our canola crush industry here in the province is growing and growing at a fabulous pace. And you know, it's a pace we don't want to see slow down, and this certainly slows that down. And I'll get Bill to comment a little further on this too. It's a process that we've encouraged and engaged with, you know, our value-added industry here in the province. The supports for them are second to none.

As I said before, the removal of the carbon tax levels the playing field for those canola crush producers as well, and they really appreciate that level playing field with the US. You know, we were the only ones punishing our producers and our manufacturers with the industrial carbon tax. And by not collecting that, that was a huge win for the canola crush industry as well as producers, like I said before.

And I'll ask Bill to maybe follow up with some further comments.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yes, maybe a few things I would add is just support that we have for the overall value-added sector in the province, stemming from things like the Saskatchewan value-added incentive. Again the minister referenced the removal of the carbon tax, which makes value-added processing more efficient in the province. And even things like we're doing from a business risk management perspective that helps de-risk the production of commodities at the grower level, and making sure that value-added processors have the feedstock that they need in an abundant supply.

But there's no denying the challenge that the canola crush sector will be facing, and efforts mostly are focused on the removal of tariffs in China because that is the most important thing that we can do for the canola sector today.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Thank you. Yeah, obviously we've long pushed for the removal of the carbon tax, and certainly it brings some relief. Clearly those tariffs from China have to be scrapped, and we've been clear as well that the tariff that's been put on Chinese EVs, that that should certainly be scrapped if that's a tool to get this resolved.

This was an issue that emerged in August of last year which signalled that we were threatened with some challenges on this front. Could you speak to, as minister, how you represented Saskatchewan's interests with the federal minister and with China on this front?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to go back to when these tariffs were imposed on Chinese EVs. That was in August of 2024. My predecessor immediately wrote a letter to the federal government indicating the potential response

by China to these tariffs.

Upon my role as Minister of Ag, I had several FPT [federal-provincial-territorial] calls, including the federal minister of Agriculture. And it started and ended with canola counter-tariffs from China. I had a face-to-face meeting with minister MacAulay when he was here in the city for Canadian Western Agribition, and I again started and ended with these Chinese EV tariffs and how they impacted our producers here in this province.

I continue to engage, work with those producer groups. Minister Blois, upon being installed as the new federal Minister of Agriculture, reached out to me immediately. And again I started and ended with the importance of engaging with China on these counter-tariffs.

I encouraged him to talk to the new Prime Minister and to immediately engage with China. It started and ended with removing these tariffs and engaging with China. I couldn't reiterate that strong enough that it's very, very important, not to Saskatchewan's economy alone, but indeed Canada's economy. And he assured me he would take it forward.

I did not hear back that the Prime Minister did engage with China before the election was called, even though it was committed to at the premiers' table and I had assurances from Minister Blois that he would carry that forward and ask the Prime Minister to do that. So I had no response that he did, and now we're into the election campaign. It's very unfortunate, but that's the reality we're in now. The federal government needs to bear responsibility for this and engage immediately. Again, I can't say that enough. I started and ended each of my conversations with the importance of canola, canola crush, canola meal, and canola oil is to our trade here in Saskatchewan.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you, Minister. A statement and then a question. I have written to all three of the federal leaders outlining a number of priorities in agreement here, one of them being the need, the urgent need, to have these Chinese tariffs removed. I'll let you know if I hear back from them.

The other question I had, you mentioned having a phone call with the new Minister of Agriculture federally, and certainly appreciate that the EV tariffs, the canola tariffs, the Chinese tariffs, were raised. Was there any discussion of business risk management, particularly AgriStability, on that call?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, my phone call with Minister Blois was very brief and mentioned that working on some things. Asked me for no input. And the day before the election was called, you heard the announcement the same as we did.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you for that. Last year in committee, the previous minister indicated that there were continued consultations about improvements to AgriStability with the federal minister. Could you give an outline of what some of those improvements might have looked like, and how they hold up against what the suggested changes that have been put forward by the Ag minister to AgriStability?

[21:15]

**Jeff Morrow:** — Jeff Morrow, president-CEO, SCIC [Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation].

So last year and throughout this year I'd say there was a focus for AgriStability to improve how it responds to livestock producers. So some of the things that were looked at included the way hay is valued, and really to acknowledge that because hay is such a local market, when there's dry conditions in Saskatchewan or Alberta the hay price goes up, and that's when producers need hay.

And the way the AgriStability program works currently is that value of inventory rises. So when they need hay, we're counting that it's got a higher value in their feed yard. So looking at it there ways to address that?

The other piece was looking at if there were considerations for expanding the list of allowable expenses for the livestock sector, including things like pasture rent or some of the feed costs that aren't allowable. And I'd say the status of those is those are currently being discussed at kind of the officials levels, at FPT tables. So that's some of the work that was going on.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Sure, thank you. With respect to some of the support that canola producers . . . Obviously we need these tariffs scrapped. We know how devastating this could be on the canola meal side, what this means for crush, crushers. We all know the price impacts and income impacts for producers.

Could you be specific around what you'd be advocating for for some of the needed backstops right now to step up for producers? I know AgriStability is one of those programs that's been looked to, and there's been calls from producers on this front, but could you speak to program reforms that you'd be calling for for whomever the next federal government is? Because of course these are cost-shared programs. Can you speak to the suite of improvements that you'd be pushing for right now?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, certainly removal of the counter-tariffs, and probably that begins with the removal of our tariffs on Chinese EVs. Certainly we see that as the sticking point. We need the federal government . . . We needed the old federal government to engage, and it seems that they didn't. But we look forward to encouraging and insisting that the new federal government takes this on.

I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition did write the three main party federal leaders in regards to these tariffs. I'm glad she'll report back when she hears something. I'm curious to know when those letters were written. Was it after the Chinese counter-tariffs were imposed or was it at the outset back in August? And I'll just leave that there.

The AgriStability program is certainly suited to help producers through this, and we look forward to working with any future federal Ag minister in that regard. We've asked for increased interest-free advance payments to help producers in the short term, but overall we need tariffs removed, our Canadian tariffs on EV vehicles from China, and we need China to remove the counter-tariffs on our canola oil, canola meal, and peas.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Thanks. Yeah, and we've been consistent with all the three leaders there about this matter. We

value that. I think it's critical.

So you've talked about engaging rightfully with the previous government, with the current prime minister, with the previous Ag minister. What about Poilievre on this front? We've kind of gone right across the piece, because in our view, this should be a position where we just have a very clear position that represents, you know, producers' interests here.

Have you had a chance to communicate this position to Poilievre? Because we haven't seen him call for that removal of the EVs, the tariff on EVs, as far as I'm aware. And I think it's just one of these matters where we need to be consistent and clear with all leaders in Ottawa, and ideally we need all leaders in Ottawa, regardless of who the next prime minister is, to be clear on these matters as well.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I spoke with the federal Ag critic with the Conservative Party of Canada and I reiterated my same concerns that I shared with both the current Minister of Ag federally and the previous minister of Ag. He heard me loud and clear.

Again I started and ended with, we need to remove these Chinese EV tariffs and engage with China and have them remove their counter-tariffs on our canola oil, our canola meal, and peas.

**Carla Beck:** — You'll let us know if you hear back too?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — That's where it starts. I spoke with him actually, so I'm going to say . . . And you know, I think as they're in campaign mode, our canola groups, our producer groups have been fully engaged with all the candidates. They're not stopping their advocacy because of a campaign. In fact I'm going to suggest they actually ramp it up during the campaign. They're very active. They're actually active over in China, you know, as we speak.

And we encourage all those producer groups, our manufacturers, anybody. All hands on deck. And our beef and our pork producers the same. It's no better time to come together and support removing these tariffs.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Yeah, without a doubt the tariffs need to go, and without a doubt, as we've identified, producers need to be supported and have a solid backstop in the interim while they're being hit with the impacts.

The minister identified AgriStability, as we have and as producers have, as a tool on this front to be a backstop. Talked as well about the advanced payment program and some improvements that could be brought there. Certainly we've been advocating along with producers on this front for needed improvements around increases to that payment rate and compensation rate into the cap, importantly, as well.

I guess my question to the minister, as this is, you know, his estimates that we're dealing with here, the budget: have any of those improvements that are going to be needed, at this time, are any of those reflected in this budget?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the federal announcement came out just a day before the federal election was

called, it was after our provincial budget. Also with that announcement, there was no ask, no mention of funding. There's really nothing to sign on to, nothing to negotiate. That remains to be seen. But it's one thing you can be guaranteed, that this Saskatchewan government will always be behind our producers and support them in whatever they need to ride this out. And we'll be there advocating with those producer groups, advocating with our federal government — whoever that may be — to remove these EV tariffs that the Liberal-NDP coalition government instated in August of 2024.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Okay, getting kind of the political stuff in of course supported by Poilievre, so right across the piece. And this is the thing. Like, this is where we shouldn't get distracted. Just good, united table out of Saskatchewan is what will allow us to succeed for producers right now, not sort of divisive, petty, partisan arguments.

And not booking the costs, I'd say, Minister, in the budget here. And fair enough that you don't know exactly what the design of the program's going to be, but the way it works is these are cost-shared programs. So if we're advocating out of Saskatchewan, as I sure hope we are, that we need improvements to AgriStability and some of these backstops, the way it then works is there's a cost-share that we're on the hook for along with the federal government. So it's disappointing that that's not in the budget with any level of plan or contingency.

But I'll take it to another place that producers of course have been pushing hard for — some fairness and equity in the livestock sector and a better backstop for livestock producers — for a long time, and so have we. We've been pushing at this table and in this Assembly for equity and that better backstop.

One of the improvements that needs to be brought — it's a matter of simple equity — is for the provincial and the federal government to cost-share premiums for livestock price insurance and for improved livestock business risk management programs. We don't see this in this budget, but we certainly hear it very clearly from the livestock sector, the importance of this, and it is a matter of fairness.

I guess my question to the minister is, where is he at on this important call that's been made now for a number of years from the livestock sector and certainly from the official opposition as well?

[21:30]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just in regards to the federal AgriStability changes announcement, that there was no mention of cost-sharing or any details around that, so we don't know what that looks like. It was their announcement and their announcement alone. It does take buy-in from all the provinces, so we'll see where that is.

Getting back to the Saskatchewan livestock price insurance and what producers are, the livestock price insurance is a valuable program. The main pushback has been that it's not a national program. That's why the feds don't want to cost-share that with the provinces.

So Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation has successfully

worked with the Maritime provinces to support them in their eastern livestock price insurance program. And the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation will continue the efforts to have livestock price insurance be considered national in scope, a distinction that our federal partners require for it to become a standard business risk management program and the ability to have that cost-shared.

I'll ask the president and CEO of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation, Jeff Morrow, to comment a little further on some of the other initiatives.

**Jeff Morrow:** — Thanks, Minister. So on the livestock sector, it's an area that we have been focused on. And we have a working group that we've had for a number of years across the sector kind of looking at their priority items to make the programs better. And I know we've checked off a number of those priorities.

Maybe some of the recent enhancements I would highlight, a couple of years ago we added a number of weather stations. That's always been a concern of producers, that the weather station's too far away from where they're grazing their livestock. So we filled in some gaps there, added some weather stations.

We also increased the coverage significantly in 2024 that was available to producers. That was another concern, that the value of the forage rainfall insurance program in particular wasn't high enough, so we found a way to improve the coverage. And last year we did see an increase in participation. And the work continues.

You know, in the news release when we announced the program this year, we did talk about evaluating different remote sensing satellite technologies to see if we can get the coverage more localized so that it's more relevant or responsive to the producers where they're actually grazing their livestock.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yeah, just to follow up on my comments, you know, with crop insurance. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation got to help out the Maritime provinces with their livestock price insurance program, so got them on board. What we really need is Ontario and Quebec to sign on. We won't give up. And you know, it's important to our producers, and we will continue to advocate to those two provinces to come into a national program and put some pressure on the federal government to cost-share this livestock price insurance.

You know, as a producer myself, I'm certainly a participant in livestock price insurance and understand the value there is in protecting and backstopping our livestock cattle producers.

**Carla Beck:** — Minister, can you report on the status of the crop insurance satellite forage, the forage insurance pilots?

**Jeff Morrow:** — So with regard to the satellite forage pilot, that's the remote sensing that I referred to. So we are evaluating to see if that is a feasible solution to improve what we have currently. So our plan for 2025 is what we're calling a shadow pilot, to kind of look at our current technology and satellite technologies and run them through on all of our forage acres, talk to a number of producers to see how it resonates with them, how it responded. So our plan is, because we do want to be thoughtful and deliberate to make sure, if we do make a change, that we're

adding value and that it's improving the program.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you. Unfortunately, you know, also facing some producers, some ranchers in the province right now, concerns around TB [tuberculosis]. And I'm just wondering if there's anything in this budget or any plans to support those who have been impacted. I understand some of them have been having to quarantine and feed cattle for a prolonged period before the investigation has even started. They're facing some significant costs. And I'm just looking to see if there's any support in this budget to help them with those costs that they've incurred already and are likely to incur going into the future.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Sorry, I may have missed . . . You're referring to . . .

**Carla Beck:** — TB.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Okay.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yes, certainly. So you know, our chief veterinary officer has been in contact with both the producer that's affected by the bovine tuberculosis and working very, very closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I will state that first off, bovine TB is a federally reported disease, so compensation for depopulation and testing is borne by the federal government, so we're working with them.

The unfortunate situation sometimes is that, in a case like this where it might be breeding stock, they might be undervalued. So we're working very closely with the federal government to ensure that the right level of compensation is achieved for this farming operation. And we won't know the extent of this until all of the trace-in and trace-out work has been completed, and experience has told us that that can take an extended amount of time. So we'll continue to monitor that.

You know, the specific question about what supports that we done, a couple of things that I would point to. We've written a letter to the federal government asking for an extension to the livestock tax deferral for this producer. And the other one is that ministry staff will explore AgRecovery as an option for support for the extraordinary costs that the producer will face. And again continuing to press the federal government because compensation only covers depopulation. It does not cover sanitation and the cleanup of the disposal sites. So we're continuing to press the federal government to make sure that there is a fair compensation for this producer in this unfortunate situation.

**Carla Beck:** — Yeah, certainly those concerns have been raised both with the timeliness, as I mentioned the feed that it costs, as well as the inadequacy of the \$5,000-per-cow max, and then nothing to deal with the disinfecting after. So encouraged, hope to see some changes to that. It's not a situation, on top of everything else, that of course any producer wants to be in and then be paying an extra price on top of that.

A quick question about RALP [resilient agricultural landscapes program]. There was a bit of discussion in estimates last year. I'm just wondering about the uptake on that program. How many producers, how many acres are enrolled?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Regarding RALP, 374 applications and \$7.94 million paid.

**Carla Beck:** — Number of acres converted?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — I don't have that number here tonight.

**Carla Beck:** — Okay. Can you table it with us or table it with the committee? Thank you. One of the questions that was asked last year — and I'm going to try a new minister on this question — there was discussion about stacking RALP with other initiatives, the NGO [non-governmental organization] initiatives to increase payments to producers.

The reason I think that was stated at the time was it might encourage more conversion to have two different programs. We've seen Alberta, for example, be able to stack. I noted on the Alberta website today that their program is fully subscribed. I'm just wondering if there is any reconsideration of those producers, those ranchers being able to stack RALP and other initiatives?

[21:45]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So yes, under that program we have decided not to allow stacking to environmental groups to top up on our programming. We wanted to ensure that both the government dollars and the environment dollars could impact the maximum number of acres as opposed to stacking them and which, I mean, less acres being impacted at the end of the day. So you know, we're just into year three, so we want to make sure we can impact the most acres out there.

**Carla Beck:** — Was the program fully subscribed this year?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — This program runs for five years. Like I said, we're in year three, and it's managed over that five years. And we've never left dollars on the table yet, so I would expect it to be fully expended.

**Trent Witherspoon:** — Thanks so much. Just to turn our attention to a file that we've worked with the livestock sector for some time and brought to this legislature, this committee in the past, but it's the importance of addressing meat pricing and fairness for producers, and importantly then addressing some of the anticompetitive behaviours of the duopoly or these out-of-province, out-of-country multinational meat packers, and being able to build up meat processing here in Saskatchewan. Certainly we see some good local abattoirs and processors across this province. But this really represents an opportunity for producers across this province, better value for them. It's a job creator across the province as well, and providing value and choice for consumers.

So we've laid some policy on some proposals and pushed for action in the past. I'd like to hear if the minister is stepping up to make building our meat processing industry a priority.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yes, thank you for that. As you know, one of the goals in the Saskatchewan plan for growth is certainly to double the revenue from the livestock sector. And we're doing a number of things in support of a robust livestock sector, including creation of a robust business risk management suite of programs.

We've already talked about LPI [livestock price insurance] and forage insurance today. We support the livestock sector through a number of research and innovation investments through the Agriculture Development Fund, the strategic research program, and funding for the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence in Saskatoon. All of this is aimed at building a very robust livestock production sector on which to build value-added processing.

And I think you can maybe draw a bit of a corollary to what's happened in the crop sector as well in terms of a robust primary agriculture crop sector that has led to investment in value-added processing in canola.

So you know, for us it's really about support at that primary level that hopefully will lead to investments in additional meat processing here in the province.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — I'd just say that there's . . . I mean there's really active conversations with producers and some improvements that could be brought to policies and some of the incentives to make meat processing a priority and to make sure that we're getting fairness as well for live cattle for producers and, you know, standing up against anticompetitive behaviours of that out-of-province, out-of-country duopoly.

And so I'd really urge action on this front. It's about value for producers and it's about opportunity, economic opportunity in the province, and as well for, you know, kind of a win-win for consumers. We'll continue to push on those fronts.

I'm going to kick it over. You touched on research, and I know our leader has a couple comments on research.

**Carla Beck:** — At the risk of looking foolish in front of my own crop scientist beside me here . . . Kidding aside, you know, one of the things, Minister, you mentioned off the top — the resiliency, the growth in yields, in value of crops in this province — many of the innovations that have happened right here have been due to investment and research. I know some would peg it at every dollar invested in research has a \$33 return, and it's certainly something we've heard consistently. Changing weather cycles, volatility is super important — especially at this time, I think — to be investing in research.

I'm just wondering, Minister, why the decision was made in this budget at this time to basically flatline research dollars.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, as we're into year three of the five-year plan, the five-year agreement, and the current year is 38.228. But I hear from producers and researchers over and over, "Thanks for that commitment." And going into the next five years, we will look forward to funding even more additional projects.

**Carla Beck:** — Certainly we've heard from producers, from commodity groups, you know, the importance of research. Certainly funding for public research and plant breeding is something that's valued. It's something that we have derived a great deal of value from so I look forward to increased investments in coming years.

I'm starting to get a bit nervous about the time here, Minister.

There's a few things that I wanted to ask about. One of the things, again given the number of months we've just been through, renewed focus on the trade infrastructure, not only increasing that trade infrastructure but improving the reliability and effectiveness of rail transport in particular when we're talking about exports out of this province.

One of the things that has been called for is an export sales reporting program for rail efficiency to improve market transparency and planning throughout the grain handling and transportation system, including the ports as well. Has there been any consideration, or has that call been made, or any work towards developing such a system here in the province? I know we've heard a lot of concerns about the percentage of grain cars that have been delivered, demurrage, and difficulty in the ports. Is this something that you're engaged in? And can you report progress towards it, please.

[22:00]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly when it comes to rail we have ongoing meetings with both CN and CPKC [Canadian Pacific Kansas City], get reports from them as well. I will mention that Highways kind of takes the lead in that transportation space. But it's one thing that producers and buyers of our commodities, I hear time and time again, is the reliability. And being a landlocked province, that reliability is so important. And part of that reliability is having the capacity on the rail.

So I've used this line before. We need to keep the oil in the pipeline and the grain on the train. And that pipeline is a big part of interprovincial trade and we need it from coast to coast. And that grain and our oilseed shipments and other ag and ag value-added commodities can fulfill that rail and get to port. We need some labour stability and we need reliability at the port as well. Bill, anything to add?

**Carla Beck:** — Minister, I think you'll find we're in agreement here. The question that I had specifically was about the call from producers to basically have a reporting system around reliability to ensure that things are running as they ought to be. Absolutely we need to be investing in pipelines, in rail capacity, but also improving the reliability of those systems. We need to be improving, you know, reducing interprovincial trade barriers when it comes to trucking and other industries. I mean there's agreement there.

What I'm asking is if there is anything to report in terms of progress towards a system, such as has been asked for, to ensure that there is transparency in reporting. I think sometimes that can go a long way in terms of pressuring companies to live up to what's been agreed in terms of the delivery of cars, for example, and the efficient passage of commodities through ports on to those markets that we know that we need to engage with and expand.

**Bill Greuel:** — Yeah, so we monitor rail performance of CPKC and CN on a weekly basis. A lot of this data is pulled from public sources that we compile. If there are producer groups that are interested in more information related to the performance of rail lines on a weekly basis, they can feel free to connect with us and we can share with them where we get this data and information.



**Carla Beck:** — I'll send something to the minister. These certainly have been public calls and I can forward these to the minister. You know, the accountability there is certainly important.

I'm going to move on to something else now. I'm going to go back to a report from the Provincial Auditor back to the fall of last year around the Farm Land Security Board and concerns around foreign entities purchasing Saskatchewan farm land. Of course her report is publicly available as well.

There were a number of recommendations. I believe that there were nine recommendations that came forth in that report. I'm just looking to the minister to get confirmation that he accepts these findings and report progress towards the recommendations that were contained therein.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the Provincial Auditor released her report in the fall, and we fully accept her report.

I understand that the board has adjusted how it documents conflicts of interest; provided exemption applicants a confirmation of the date that their application will be heard by the board; directed a 30-day maximum time frame for transaction review; and staff are requesting statutory declarations from all out-of-province corporations when purchasing land.

In the coming months the board will implement a new statutory declaration requesting additional information with a focus on financing, modify the annual report and website with additional enforcement activities, review registered lease interests, and refine processes and focus on escalation procedures to meet the board's needs.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you, Minister. Those are calls that I know my colleague has made for some time. It's important to see some of those changes made.

I believe you said refinements. One of the specifics that I wanted to ask you about was something that was presented on page 77 of that report, volume 2 of the 2024 report, that noted that in Saskatchewan, land titles registration requires farm land to review the purchases after the transaction. Other jurisdictions look to have that verification before, like in Alberta and Manitoba. Was that a change that was considered? Was it implemented?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Provincial Auditor highlighted in their recent audit, there are pros and cons to registration before and after compliance is confirmed. It is important to consider all of the impacts of the different models. Registration of land in the province involves *The Land Titles Act, 2000* ... and the Act. Our government needs to explore the most effective way to register land.

We will continue to explore options to determine what makes sense for landowners and the province. And I'll just add that *The Land Titles Act* is under Justice. Bill, do you have anything to complement that?

**Bill Greuel:** — Yeah, the only thing I would have added, Minister, that you added at the end was that this is dependent on

the Ministry of Agriculture working with the Ministry of Justice, because it would involve changes to *The Land Titles Act* as well.

**Carla Beck:** — Just to confirm, that work is ongoing now?

**Bill Greuel:** — I think we're taking into consideration all of the recommendations made by the Provincial Auditor.

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Just with respect to the Bunge-Viterra merger, could you give us an update of whether or not you undertook an economic assessment with respect to that merger? And could you share some of the results around impacts for producer incomes, for example, or transport impacts or competition impacts, job impacts, canola crush impacts? Just any of those pieces.

[22:15]

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Government of Saskatchewan, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, consulted with stakeholders about the proposed merger. Based on the consultation, the ministry made a submission to Transport Canada and the Competition Bureau in December 2023.

In its submission the ministry asked for further review regarding competition in the country, including for small crops; competition at the port of Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Thunder Bay; impact on the crush sector; impact on port capacity and highway infrastructure; and level of rail service for Bunge Viterra and its competitors.

Transport Canada report provides a public interest assessment. The report is not made public and was shared with the federal Minister of Transport for review in June of 2024. There are 24 terms and conditions stemming from Transport Canada's report, and I'd be available to share those if you like.

**Carla Beck:** — If you're offering to share them, absolutely. Could you table it?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — I'd rather just read it off here but . . .

**Carla Beck:** — Well I have a few more questions. So if you could table it, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — I'd prefer getting it onto the record but, Mr. Chair, what do you think?

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — If you want to read them, Minister, that's your prerogative.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Okay. There are 24 terms and conditions including:

Bunge's divestiture of six grain elevators that purchase canola seed near Bunge's canola crush plants at Altona, Manitoba and Nipawin, Saskatchewan to maintain competitive options for producers in the region.

Legally binding controls on Bunge's minority ownership stake,

25 per cent, in Saudi-owned G3. This includes ensuring that Bunge nominates only independent directors of G3, preventing Bunge from exercising unilateral rights to impede the operation and growth of G3 initiatives linked to grain origination, grain handling, and port terminal businesses, as well as borrowing related to such activities.

Protecting G3's confidential information through a minority shareholder confidentiality protocol and notably the terms and conditions do not include requirements for Bunge to divest of G3.

Retaining Viterra's head office in Regina for at least five years with no fewer than 200 personnel.

A binding commitment from Bunge to invest at least \$520 million in Canada within the next five years composed of 500 million for capital such as port terminals and grain elevators, 15 million for not-for-profit or charitable causes, and 5 million for regenerative agriculture programs.

Specific to canola processing, Bunge is required to maintain Bunge Canada's and Viterra Canada's existing oilseed processing capacity in Canada and to complete a feasibility study within two years on adding canola processing and export capacity in Canada. Details on the proposed Viterra canola crush facility near Regina, capable of crushing 2.5 million metric tonnes annually, are absent from these terms and conditions. Announced in 2021, this project was paused, and it is unclear if it will resume since many factors, not including this merger, have changed.

Bunge will be required to engage with the National Supply Chain Office to further strengthen the resiliency of the agriculture supply chain and with industry partners, including the major Canadian rail carriers, to address shipping bottlenecks and inefficiencies in Canada's rail transportation network.

Bill, did I miss anything?

**Bill Greuel:** — No. The rest of the terms and conditions are in the OC [order in council] that was published by the Government of Canada.

**Carla Beck:** — Minister, I thought you were giving me new information here, but thank you for that. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague here.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Just a couple quick questions here. One around drought and, you know, hopefully we're in a better moisture situation here this year, but we still have some dry areas through this winter. Hopefully we get some good rains as we go into a growing season.

But what are you doing to respond to potential of drought? At some point you're going to be facing these situations. And there's always been a standing call from producers that, as opposed to just reacting in an emergency with, you know, emergency programs, that an active drought committee working with you and your ministry would be of great value. Could you speak to actions you're taking to work with producers on this front?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I've said before, our suite of business risk management programs is always

our first line of defence for our ag producers. The Government of Saskatchewan supports research projects that help our farmers adopt more sustainable practices and new methods to counter the effects of drought, diseases, and other environmental challenges they face. With an emphasis on monitoring, the Ministry of Agriculture leads a moisture monitoring committee with participants from the ministry, Water Security Agency, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

In the fall of 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan brought together provincial ministries and agencies to establish a provincial drought steering committee. Led by the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, the committee includes the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Government Relations, and Ministry of Agriculture along with Saskatchewan Water, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation, and Water Security Agency. The ministry holds regular stakeholder calls with crops and livestock groups to understand conditions they may be facing.

Ongoing discussions with industry and hearing from stakeholders is vital to the work we do. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation administers a full suite of business risk management programs, including crop insurance, AgriStability, livestock price insurance, and wildlife damage compensation and prevention program.

Continuous innovation in the crop insurance program is ongoing to ensure that it is responsive for Saskatchewan producers. For example, work continues in evaluating potential improvements to forage and pasture insurance to ensure forage insurance is relevant and accessible for livestock producers here in Saskatchewan.

After consultation with livestock producers and industry associations to determine what changes to the grazing formula would provide more predictability for producers, the Ministry of Agriculture amended the Crown land grazing lease rate formula effective for this year, 2025.

The revisions in the grazing formula will offer relief to producers renting Crown land and contribute to affordability and stability for the livestock sector in the face of rising production costs. Amending the rental formula provides a transparent and straightforward calculation for producers to understand, while increasing the stability and predictability of the annual rental rate.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Thanks. Thanks again. The call is to work together, yeah, with an active drought team so we can be as responsive or proactive as possible. And I know producers would really value being fully involved in building a team on that front, working with you and your team.

With respect to irrigation, can you speak to what's happening on this front this year, including support for smaller projects and for producers? And can you give us an update on how many irrigable acres are available and what the uptake was in this last year? I think year to year it's been hovering around 10,000 acres.

**Penny McCall:** — Good evening. My name is Penny McCall. I'm an assistant deputy minister for innovation and regulation. And regarding the irrigation questions that you have, in the last five years we now have just over 81,000 acres that have come on.

And actually within our growth plan we were trying to achieve 85,000 acres, so we're over 95 per cent of the way there. And so we have seen significant increase in terms of that acres.

We continue to support the irrigation sector through, again, the research and development sides, through various programming, extension, through *The Irrigation Act*, where we support them to ensure that they are following their sustainable production.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — And just a last question: how many irrigable acres are available right now?

**Penny McCall:** — So you mean in the province total?

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — That's right.

**Penny McCall:** — In total we are at around four hundred and . . . Sorry, I'm going to make sure I have my numbers.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Land available for uptake.

**Penny McCall:** — So what I'll be able to speak to is the total number of irrigated acres in the province so far, and that's 145,000 acres. As I said, just in the last five years we have put on 81,000.

[22:30]

And you know, we expect that next year or this coming season we'll probably have another 20,000 acres.

I am speaking though more to, based on our current infrastructure that we already have, and I'm speaking to what I would call the infill acres. And so I don't have the exact number of what the remaining acres are. It really is up to the irrigation districts as well as independent irrigators to put that forward. If you are referring to the larger expansion project . . . No, okay. Then yeah, leave it there.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Yeah, it was the question around the infill acres that I followed up with in the past. I'll touch on one other. Another piece here is the whole value-add opportunity and . . .

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Just, Mr. Wotherspoon, we have reached 10:30.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — We started five late.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Okay, we've got three minutes.

**Trent Wotherspoon:** — Thanks, Chair. With respect to value-add opportunities and ILOs [intensive livestock operation], we certainly hear challenges in just some levels of uncertainty. And I'm wondering what plans you might have as a ministry to provide greater certainty to, you know, realize some of the opportunity around value-add and ILOs in the province. Intensive livestock operations. Thanks, Chair.

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, certainly always encourage and supportive of any value-added efforts that we can garner in this province. In regards to intensive livestock operations, ILOs, just for the member to understand clearly what

that is, Government Relations and municipalities, we work strongly with them to set up a favourable regulatory environment to allow these to proceed. Thank you.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Thank you, Minister. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Agriculture. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Daryl Harrison:** — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd firstly like to thank all my officials here tonight and their help preparing for estimates, and thank you very much for all the work you do. Thank you to the committee here tonight for going into overtime. I appreciate you all. I know it's past my bedtime, and I don't know about the rest of you, but probably close as well. So I appreciate the extent of time you put forth here.

Also like to include Hansard and their endeavours to getting this all logged for us for future reference, and the Clerks tableside here for all their extended efforts in this regard as well. It's very much appreciated. Then just once again, thanks to the committee as a whole. Thank you.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Thank you, Minister. Closing comments, MLAs?

**Carla Beck:** — Thank you. I want to say thank you to the minister and to the officials from the Ministry of Agriculture sincerely, for not only the work tonight but the work probably more importantly that you do outside of this room, definitely in supporting producers here in this province — our world-class agriculture industry, something that we're all incredibly proud of — and especially during a time that they're looking to you, looking for answers and support and stability. I just want to say thank you very much. I know that it's appreciated.

To my fellow committee members, the Chair, the Clerk's office, Hansard, the folks in broadcast services, as well as my colleagues here on this side, I just want to say thanks to all of you. And those watching at home, it's time to go to bed. It's past everyone's bedtime. Thank you.

**Chair Thorsteinson:** — Great. Once again, thank you, Minister, and all your officials for taking the time to be here with us tonight. And at this point the committee will stand adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 22:35.]