



INTRODUCTION TO THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

MANDATE

The Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry has the mandate to examine legislation and to study, on order of the Senate, issues related to agriculture and forestry. The agriculture and agri-food portfolio covers all department and agencies that are under the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture.

While most of the forest on Crown land is managed by the provinces, the federal government is responsible for many forest-related matters. These includes a fiduciary responsibility to aboriginal peoples, responsibility for the protection of endangered species, migratory birds, navigable waters, fisheries, environmental assessment, forest research and technology development, and the regulation of trade and commerce, including the export of forest products.

HISTORY

On May 16, 1986, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry was divided into two separate committees: the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, and the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries. The Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, hereafter referred to as the committee, convened on March 11, 1987.

Over the years, the committee's studies have covered a wide range of topical subjects and various crises while longer term issues have provided a forum for in-depth analyses of changes that shaped, and are still influencing, the future of agriculture and forestry. For instance, in 1986, the committee tabled what was to become one of the most widely distributed and read reports in the history of the Senate. Entitled *Soil at Risk: Canada's Eroding Future*, the report helped to raise awareness of soil degradation and its potential impact on the environment, on consumers and on the Canadian economy.

SELECTED STUDIES

In May 2015, the committee tabled a report on the topical subject of bee health entitled *The Importance of Bee Health to Sustainable Food Production in Canada*. The goal of this study was to find a balance between maintaining the health of bees and producing the crops we need to feed ourselves.

The committee tabled a report in June 2014, entitled *Innovation in Agriculture: The Key to Feeding a Growing Population*. The report consists of three parts and contains a total of 19 recommendations. The first part of the report focuses on how the sector is constantly changing

and how those involved must be ready to adapt. The second part of the report speaks to the importance of innovation and its necessity in achieving desired goals. The final part of the report emphasizes the need to continue to be innovative and open to new ideas.

Addressing the forestry side of its portfolio, the committee tabled another report related to the theme of innovation in July 2011 entitled *The Canadian Forest Sector: A Future Based on Innovation* which made a diagnosis of problems in the forest industry. Specifically, it describes the causes and origins of the crisis that the industry is going through, including structural (e.g. drop in demand for newsprint due to the growth of electronic publications) and cyclical causes (e.g. the decline in the US Market). The role and responsibilities of the federal government with respect to research, market and trade development in the forestry sector, amongst others, are also assessed.

In June 2008, the committee tabled a report entitled *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*. The report made 68 recommendations aimed at reducing rural poverty and rural decline in Canada and increasing the federal government policy commitment to rural issues. In the same year, the committee produced a report entitled “*Growing*” *Costs for Canadian Farmers*. The study looked at the factors behind the large increase in farm input prices that occur periodically.

In April 2004, through a report entitled *The BSE Crisis – Lessons for the Future*, the committee addressed the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis which had recently struck the agriculture sector.

SELECTED LEGISLATIVE WORK

Since the committee took on its current form in 1987, it has had numerous bills referred to it that focussed on agricultural issues. These bills dealt primarily with amendments to already existing acts such as *the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act* and *the Canadian Wheat Board Act*.

CURRENT WORK

For information on the current work of the committee, you may wish to review the orders of reference the committee has received from the Senate, or review the committee proceedings. Detailed information on current work of the committee can be found on the parliamentary website at <http://senate-senat.ca/agfo.asp>.