

*Canadian Wheat Board Act*

I participated in the symposium on the Farm Bill in Washington that Bill was to involve \$70 billion U.S. of subsidies. That is over \$100 billion Canadian. That is one pile of money to be spent, and a large portion of those funds have been spent and will continue to be spent with the specific purpose of displacing the markets of other countries, including Canada.

One cannot help but wonder, first, why the Prime Minister's trade deal did not address this issue and, second, how the Government could have signed that agreement knowing that as they were negotiating the trade agreement the U.S. had placed this enormous barrier, this wall of money around itself in order to displace our markets and totally destroy the prices we are getting for agricultural commodities.

As the Minister has said, there may have even been a small increase in the amount we were able to sell in the past. While that may be so, the price which we have been getting for our commodities makes holding our own in terms of quantity insufficient. I do not say this to fault the Wheat Board. It is not the Wheat Board's fault that the Government has failed to convince the United States not to go ahead with the United States Food Security Act, 1985, more commonly known as the U.S. Farm Bill.

The Minister's deputy addressed a group of Members of Parliament and gave us some excellent briefing material on the U.S. Farm Bill. Although the information was interesting, it was far from rosy and far from showing a prosperous immediate future for Canadian wheat producers and other Canadian farmers.

There are a few more issues I want to raise, but I will be brief. The Bill provides for Canadian Wheat Board Advisory Committee members to be paid an honorarium for the days they actually work advising the board as well as for travel days. We support that amendment for the people who give up their time to serve in this advisory capacity. However, we are concerned that the advisory committee members are not always consulted on issues, the one of obvious concern being this Bill.

Some people have suggested that the advisory committee was not consulted in depth with regard to the implications of this Bill having to do with foreign borrowing and so on. If the Minister tells us that that is not so, which I hope he will do, perhaps he could then provide us with whatever information was provided to the advisory committee.

The Minister indicated that producers delivering grain to the Canadian Wheat Board by way of producer cars currently share in the board's cost of carrying grain in the country elevator system with regard to storage and financing charges, even though they do not physically store grain in a country elevator. The Minister has indicated that there is an inherent benefit in having the facility there even if they do not use it. People have made arguments on both sides of that issue and I do not intend to repeat them all here today. I suppose it is somewhat like discussing the Crow's Nest Pass freight rate. There will always be two opinions on how the payment should

be made in the future. It is one of those issues that will be debated for some time to come.

• (1550)

Nevertheless, having made those brief remarks, I want to indicate to the Minister that we hope he will provide us with additional information at the committee level. Judging by the usual co-operation we get from the Minister, I have no doubt that we will get that information.

On behalf of my Party I want to indicate that we have no intention of delaying and hope that the legislation is adopted without any unnecessary delay so as to benefit the agricultural community in western Canada as soon as possible.

**Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-92, an Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I have some concerns about the Bill, but first I want to congratulate the Wheat Board on its ability to sell wheat. While we may complain about the price, at least the wheat is being sold. I do not believe any farmers in the West who depend upon Wheat Board sales would suggest that it has not done a good job in selling grain and in fact increasing our markets in the last year, which has been particularly difficult. While the price may have been low, it is something we have to accept considering the structure in which the grain had to be sold.

During a particularly difficult period for the Wheat Board in the last two years, there have been only four commissioners. While the Act only requires three to five commissioners, there were five commissioners when it was facing much less difficulty. I hope the Minister will tell us whether he intends to fill that vacancy.

I also want to comment on what impact the so-called free trade agreement might have on the Wheat Board. Presently, the Wheat Board is responsible for licensing of grain imports to Canada. We understand that legislation will probably be presented in the next year to eliminate that.

**Mr. Mayer:** You are talking about permits, are you not?

**Mr. Hovdebo:** That is right. Permits to bring in grain. I am concerned, as I think are many people, that the ability of the Wheat Board to control imports, which is a basic underpinning of the marketing system, may be eliminated as part of the free trade agreement. In fact, that is a real concern about all marketing boards, whether or not they are in supply management. I think there is some danger of undermining the Wheat Board, making it weaker.

I recognize, as I believe do most producers, that things are not the same on the farm as they were even five years ago. They are definitely not the same as they were 20 years ago. While they believe the changes the Minister has made in the sale and movement of wheat are probably steps in the right direction, it would be unfortunate if, by the stroke of a pen, we