

Private Members' Business

ber see his farming constituents' income reduced? I think not. And yet, his bill could have this effect.

Part of the success of letting industry handle oats marketing relates to the benefits of the Canada-U.S. trade agreement. The U.S. provides producers with a ready market for their product. Industry recognizes the possibilities. They are acting quickly to take advantage of the agreement that benefits Canadian farmers, because they now have the markets and the industrial support to make inroads into the U.S.

As pointed out by Can Oats, the Canada-U.S. trade agreement created an attractive and competitive environment for business by eliminating trade barriers between the two countries. This freedom to move into the marketplace helps oats farmers to maximize their sales and farm income. Oats producers now have new options available to them. These options enable producers to make the decisions that are best for them, decisions that are good for their own farms and for the health of the industry.

Let me give another example. The Oatman, a company started six years ago by Mr. Dennis Lank of Ponoka, began expanding two years ago into the United States and now into other parts of Canada. The Oatman is strictly in the horse industry and now continues to succeed and is planning to expand even further. With direct access to markets, oats producers now share the same benefit as other open market producers such as canola or other off-board grains. By watching cash and futures markets, talking to their local elevator manager and reading market publications, farmers have the price information they need, like those who deal directly and privately with the Oatman.

The federal government has a duty to help farmers develop this industry. Government must not take away the right and opportunity for farmers to decide for themselves how their industry should work. Consequently, Madam Speaker, I cannot support this bill.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Madam Speaker, I support the principle of this bill. The principle of this private member's bill makes a lot of sense. I think my hon. friend, the hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, stated the case very well. I would not want to go over much of the ground already covered by my hon.

friend, but there are a number of things that I want to say about this bill and I might even, if I dare, draw on some of the rather cataclysmic events that have been evident on the Hill in the past few hours.

It seems that one of the basic lessons for all politicians and certainly for politicians in government is that you listen to the people. If this government had listened to the agricultural community many months ago in the spring, there would have been no need for this private member's bill, none whatsoever. We would not be discussing this private member's bill if the government had listened, if the government had not removed oats from the Canadian Wheat Board in the first place.

If the government had listened to the agricultural community, we would not be carrying on with this discussion today, but this government does not listen. It does not listen. For example, as my friend, the hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, said a few moments ago, 63 per cent of farmers surveyed did not want oats taken away from the Canadian Wheat Board, but this government went ahead and did so because it did not listen, it did not consult. In fact, that very same survey indicated that as few as 18 per cent of farmers who were surveyed felt that they were properly and adequately consulted by this government, specifically the minister responsible for grains and oilseeds. I think that is a pretty shabby record. We talk about reputable organizations like the prairie pools, the National Farmers Union, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Advisory Board to the Canadian Wheat Board. They all said this was bad, this would be a bad practice, that the government would regret, that it would rue the day doing this. But the government did not listen. It did not listen.

• (1420)

My hon. friend from Wetaskiwin said a few minutes ago that by returning oats to the Canadian Wheat Board and giving it the protection of statute, it would not stop this government or any future government to take oats away from the Canadian Wheat Board. Well, that is true. We know it is true. But I will tell you one thing. It would not allow the government to be so arbitrary. This government is inclined to be arbitrary, inclined not to consult, not to listen to the people of Canada.