

Government Orders

I was very upset, and I have been upset more than once, when a certain kind of question went to a member of the cabinet and the cabinet member stood up and said: "This is another example of x millions of dollars this government has given to farmers". I get very annoyed at that. That is an excellent opportunity for the minister to explain to Canadians why that is a good investment.

As I said, as goes agriculture, so goes the industry, so goes the economy of any country. It is money well spent, as long as it is well monitored.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate regarding Bill C-98. This piece of legislation has been promised to the Canadian public and to the Canadian producers for some time. In fact, it was back in 1985 that the former Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Wise, promised a long-term, permanent program for agriculture. I am glad, and I am sure most people are glad to see that it is finally arriving.

There are some good aspects to this bill. The fact that there has been more consultation than usual is of value. The fact that there is a mechanism for a review every five years is a plus and that there will be an annual report on the programs to the House is also important. Those are important factors.

• (1040)

The one thing I think we must keep in mind, especially for those who are watching this debate or happen to read it in *Hansard* is that this bill does not outline the details of the particular agricultural programs. What it is instead is enabling legislation. It is legislation that is going to provide a framework which will allow the government to enter into programs. That is all that does. We have no details on exactly what form GRIP or NISA will take, the full details of premiums and so on. They do not exist in this legislation. It is simply a framework.

I think in looking at that framework perhaps the key clause section in the whole bill is the clause which sets out the statement of principles, clause 4(2). This clause outlines four basic principles which the government shall follow in establishing any programs. I would like to go through them, if I could, because I think they are important.

The first one states that the program should not unduly influence the decisions of producers of agricultural products with respect to production or marketing and should encourage adjustments with respect to production or marketing so as to improve the effectiveness of the responses of producers to market opportunities. In other words, the program will not unduly influence the market. That is fine. That is a good principle. It is important for farmers to be able to react to the market and not be forced through government programs or government regulations to skew either way. That is a good principle and it will be a good test for the program.

The second principle talks about the fact that the money shall be fairly distributed through the program; that the level of protection to be provided by and relative share of government contributions to be provided to the program in relation to particular agricultural products or classes should be reasonably consistent with all other agreements. In other words, the money should be evenly distributed. That is an important principle because what we need and what this government and past governments have failed to do time and again is to develop national programs that respect and represent this country as a whole. We often have piecemeal legislation. That also is an important principle.

The other two principles—that it shall meet international obligations and that the program shall be environmentally sound—are also very important principles.

The fact that the principles are in the legislation is important. The next question is: will they be followed? That is a question that cannot be answered today and will only be answered in time as the programs are introduced, developed, followed and reviewed.

I think another question that we would ask as social democrats is: Could we fit a strong social democratic program into this framework? The answer is, yes we could. We could follow these principles and put in a very sound social democratic program that is market responsive; that does allow producers to follow their inclinations and act with the market; that is environmentally sound; and is meeting Canada's international obligations. We could put in there a very good social democratic program.