

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Hovdebo: The member for Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia and the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who are the two members of the steering committee, were not in the House this morning so I was unable to contact them. I am proceeding with this concurrence motion in the hope that should they want to put remarks, they may do so at some time in the future.

The third report of the Public Accounts Committee deals with the Auditor General's comments on the agricultural report of 1988 regarding the development of a number of issues on which he felt, or his office felt, the effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture needed to be questioned.

Since I have spent a considerable amount of my life and my time here in the House dealing with agricultural issues, I want to move concurrence at this time. I do so because there are a number of issues dealing with food safety, the disease of animals and pesticide control. The information that is given to Parliament and which is discussed in this particular report are going to make or can make a difference in what happens relative to the agricultural industry in the next little while.

I think everybody in this House recognizes that the agricultural industry across Canada is feeling the effects of a recession which is not necessarily felt in many other parts of the economy. It is a recession which indicates that during the next few years, or the next year alone, we will have in Saskatchewan a 101 per cent reduction in income. For the first time since the 1930s the farmers of Saskatchewan will receive less income than they will pay out in costs. In other words, they will have on a general basis a negative income. Very few farmers will make more than they will pay out in costs of operation.

There is a need to bring this matter to the attention of this government. I am doing that by asking Parliament to concur in something which would assist in having the limelight focused on the difficulties of agriculture in the next year or at present.

The Auditor General in his report called upon the department to strengthen the food inspection practices. The theme of his audit findings was the need to assess the risks. He felt and expressed very articulately that although there was a considerable amount of money

being spent on food safety, there was no priority to make sure that those items which were the most dangerous to the safety of the people of Canada were getting the kind of priority that they should.

As many of you will know, in 1984, 1985 and 1986, after the Nielsen report to this House, this government reduced the number of inspectors. It left the responsibility for the inspection and safety of foods more to those companies that are producing or processing the foods, especially in the case of meat but in other foods as well. The cost is now borne by the processor. Consequently, unless the specific requirements are stated and recognized as being needed, there is a danger of moving away from that. The Public Accounts Committee made reference to that but did not make a recommendation in that particular area.

Another area which is very close to the hearts of most Canadians these days is the area of pesticide regulations. You may know, Mr. Speaker, that there is a tremendous backlog of pesticide testing requests. These are pesticides which pose a threat to human health and the environment.

The process by which the government registers pesticides, although it is fairly adequate, has been backed up to such an extent that many pesticides are registered on a temporary basis to be allowed for use in the short term. It takes about three years for a pesticide to go through all the registration processes. Often, when they are renewed they are not put through the same level of testing as they were originally.

Quite often the impact of pesticides in our environment is cumulative. We do not know too much about them when they hit the environment. We find out later. If you look at the number of pesticides that were once quite common in our environment you will see that at the moment they are now banned because we did not really know what their effect was. Again, the committee concludes that there is a need for continued progress in addressing the backlog in pesticide testing, but also a need for the establishment of a workforce which will allow these testings to be completed more quickly.

The basic concern of this report and the part with respect to which the Public Accounts Committee made the most far-reaching recommendations dealt with the information which was available to Parliament as well as