

Food Policy

Mr. Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock p.m.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: At one o'clock hon. members were questioning the ministers upon the statements made by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Abbott). The hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has the floor.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs if, in the pursuit of a food strategy and the concomitant investigation into the food industry in Canada, he can tell the House, as the minister responsible for the protection of consumer interests in the government, whether he favours the supply-management concept as exemplified by the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, and if he can tell the House whether he has satisfied himself, bearing in mind the fact that his department has made a study of this, that the supply-management concept is in the best interests of the consumer.

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, the present supply-management scheme is operating in eggs, turkeys and milk. I think they are operating with varying degrees of success. As the hon. member knows, we have examined to some extent the competitive aspects of marketing as well as other sectors of the food economy, and I would want to correct the impression which was created by news reports that this strategy implies that we will launch an over-all investigation into the food industry. That is not the case. But we are going to take, consistent with this strategy, a very close look at the whole area of retailing, processing, manufacturing and marketing. I think that is in the best interests of Canadian consumers. The hon. member asks about my general enthusiasm for supply-marketing as it might be extended to other areas. I would say that I think there are preferable methods of marketing.

Mr. McGrath: In October, 1975, the Food Prices Review Board addressed itself to the question of broiler chicken prices and made specific recommendations, one of which came out against the inclusion of broiler chickens under the Farm Producers Marketing Board and, among other recommendations, they recommended that the federal government should take more vigorous action to combat and eliminate the constraints of interprovincial and international trade in the broiler industry which are contrary to the BNA Act. I would like to ask the minister if he, as the minister responsible for the protection of consumer interests, has looked into the question of interprovincial and international trade constraints by agreement which are clearly contrary to the BNA Act and which in

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most instances are contrary to the best interests of the consumer.

Mr. Abbott: I confess that I have not taken the opportunity to analyse closely this aspect of the marketing of poultry products in Canada. As the hon. member is aware, perhaps, cabinet is currently considering the whole question of existing poultry marketing boards, so I am somewhat limited in my capacity to respond to this question.

● (1410)

Mr. McGrath: The last time the government seriously addressed itself to this question was in 1972 when it established the special committee on trends in food prices. That committee made a number of recommendations. The last recommendation, which was made in 1973, was the following:

That the federal government give consideration to the advisability of establishing a comprehensive and realistic long-term food policy for Canada, coordinated through the Department of Agriculture and that the government give consideration to having this matter referred to appropriate standing committees.

Can the minister tell the House why the government did not act on that recommendation of the committee?

Mr. Abbott: I assume the hon. member means the recommendation to refer this food strategy policy that they recommended being developed to a particular committee or to other committees.

Mr. McGrath: No.

Mr. Abbott: Perhaps I did not grasp the hon. member's question. This is the first step in producing a food strategy. It is not necessarily evident from this that we will not be referring it or parts of it on occasion to standing committees, consistent with that recommendation.

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on that point. I will direct my question to the Minister of Agriculture. The whole question of a food policy is too broad for a single parliamentary committee. Is the government giving any consideration either before the House adjourns or certainly in the fall to setting up a committee which could take possibly a few months to look into the whole aspect of a food policy for Canada and which would report back to the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, or other ministers involved?

This committee could touch on the whole question of food policy. The matter is probably too complex to allow one specific department to be involved. There are too many people and groups of people who want to have some input into the question of a food policy, and to my way of thinking a parliamentary committee struck by the House of Commons would be the most realistic way of doing it. Has the government given consideration to this and can we look for that type of committee as a result of the recommendation?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, this has been discussed and I tend to favour some kind of committee. The hon. member for