

Canadian Wheat Board Act

We are already beginning to be successful. Broeska suggests the system should be gearing up now to cope with that increase. That is an opportunity for us.

The Hon. Member referred to two-price wheat. We said the benefits are going to remain. I had a chance to meet in Toronto yesterday with the whole industry to talk about how we are going to deal with the two-price wheat system.

The benefits are going to stay there. It has nothing to do with what goes on in the free trade agreement. There is nothing in there to say the U.S. will stop supporting its farmers or that we are going to stop supporting ours. The Hon. Member does not know what he is talking about. He is raising absolute nonsense for the sake of making political brownie points. That should be an embarrassment to his Party which presently has a lot of support in an area which is suffering from very severe problems. We do not need more uncertainties raised for the sake of making political brownie points.

• (1650)

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a quick response. The Minister still has not explained how our Canola growers, our crushers, and the people who ship grain screenings, are better off paying a freight rate three or four times as high as that under the Western Grain Transportation Act. He still has not answered that question. How are we better off paying higher freight charges for shipping the products he has talked about to the northwestern United States? All that means to me is that the feed, pellet, and meal producers' lobby in the U.S. has been a lot stronger than our Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The period for questions and comments is now terminated. If the Hon. Member would like to talk to the Minister behind the curtains that would be very nice.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, we do not want to prolong this debate unnecessarily. It is certainly our intention to have the Bill moved into committee before the day is out. We appreciate the generosity of the Government House Leader (Mr. Lewis) in arranging with the Minister and the spokespersons of the opposition Parties to have this Bill referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture where it will be dealt with more expeditiously than in a legislative committee. That will also provide an opportunity for the learned members of that committee to examine a number of related issues. I believe that that is in the best interests of the legislation and the House with regard to the issues which have been raised.

The representatives of the Wheat Board will have an opportunity in committee to respond to a variety of inquiries. As well, grain producers will have an opportunity to make their views known, particularly with regard to producer cars. We have probably raised more questions in the debate today than we have heard answered on the reasons for the changes to producer cars in this legislation. Who made the requests for

changes and for what reasons? That is a legitimate question which has so far not been responded to comprehensively.

The Canadian Wheat Board Act certainly required some updating. This legislation moves in that direction, particularly with regard to the upgrading of the definition of Canola. People from western Canada appreciate not only the decision to expand acreage into Canola but also the research which has been done in western Canada to upgrade the quality of rapeseed. The reduction of acids has resulted in one of the best products in the world for producing oils, that being, of course, western Canadian Canola. We are proud of that accomplishment.

In a number of other jurisdictions we have changed the name from rapeseed to Canola to reflect the improved product. The amendment to the Canadian Wheat Board Act evidences the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board now includes in its definition of grain—in addition to wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax and rapeseed—Canola. That represents one more of the astonishing accomplishments which western Canadians have made in the development of agricultural technology around the world.

This Bill recommends changes in terms of raising funds. Traditionally the Canadian Wheat Board has been limited to loans from financial institutions. The board anticipates that it could achieve significant savings by issuing commercial paper. Considering the substantial borrowings which the Canadian Wheat Board undertakes each year, the savings resulting from this amendment should improve returns to grain producers and open a whole set of options for raising funds which hitherto did not exist.

At first blush I believe that that is a major step forward. I am sure that we all want to do whatever we can to assist the Canadian Wheat Board to assist Canadian grain producers. The spirit of the debate today verifies that.

My uncle, who runs the family farm in central Saskatchewan, reminded me that in the 1930s farmers received about \$2 for No.3 wheat. Today his son, my cousin, is getting about the same price for No.3 wheat. That tells the woeful tale of what western grain producers are up against. In some cases the price of wheat has remained unchanged since 1978. I do not think there are many commodities for which the price has not increased to reflect the cost of doing business, although that has certainly not been the case in the wheat-growing business.

Our farmers are up against some incredible odds. If the amendments in Bill C-22 can enable the Wheat Board to provide a greater service to grain producers, we will want to support them enthusiastically.

I am glad that the Government has decided to move beyond borrowing from traditional financial institutions. There has been some indication that the banks and other financial institutions have not always given the best deal, simply because the Wheat Board was restricted in where it could obtain funding. This amendment will enable the Wheat Board to