

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 7, 1985

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SEEDS ACT AND CANADA GRAIN ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Michael Wilson (for the Minister of Agriculture) moved that Bill C-64, an Act to amend the Seeds Act and the Canada Grains Act, as reported (with amendments) from a legislative committee, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (for the Minister of Agriculture) moved that the Bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to take this opportunity to speak on this Bill. To a great extent, this Bill is a housekeeping Bill. It changes the regulations under which the seed growers of Canada operate. In that sense, it is something for which the grain growers have been waiting for a considerable time. Therefore, it is important that the Bill be passed. We hope it will have the effect of tightening up a number of concerns we have about the seed structure.

At committee stage, two very small amendments were made to the Bill, both of which were very technical in nature. Consequently, there will be no consideration of those amendments before the House.

I would like to spend my time pointing out that regardless of the fact that a need for these Acts has been shown in the past and it is a good thing they exist, they do not deal with the requirements of the farmers. Tightening the mechanism and making the advertising adhere to the structure so that it may be more honest are things that need to be done, but the Bill will only help the very few people who find themselves in a particular situation. Consequently, we should spend more of the time of the House establishing some kind of structure to ensure that the farmers can survive from year to year while producing seed. Right now, for instance, every farmer is faced with continuing increases in costs. Fuel, chemicals, fertilizers, machinery, taxes and transportation costs are all going up and they all impact upon the ability of the farmer to stay viable.

● (1110)

We have been spending a considerable amount of time in the Standing Committee on Agriculture lately discussing the Western Grain Stabilization Plan. We have had a number of suggestions as to how we can put in place a safety net so that the farmer can survive in bad times. However, we are not spending enough time making sure the farmer will survive under general circumstances.

I know that almost every time the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) stands up he lists the number of things this Government has done for farmers, most of which are cosmetic and have had no real impact on the ability of the farmer to survive. We have had quite a lot of lip service paid to the necessity of the survival of the family farm as a basic farm unit. It is a sort of motherhood issue. Everyone says, yes, we have to keep the family farm. Then this Government, like the U.S. Government, allows things to happen which eliminate the family farm and reduce the number of farmers to a level which makes farming much more inefficient. Everyone accepts the fact that the family farm is probably the most efficient unit. On the Prairies it is no longer a quarter or half section, it gets up to a section or six-quarters. It has increased in size in the east as well. However, it is still the family farm unit which produces more effectively.

One of the promises this Government made during the election campaign was that it would do something about the financial structure of the farming industry. This, of course, affects the seed farmer as well. A number of promises were made. Agri-bonds were promised. A reduction of interest rates was promised. A third promise was the elimination of capital gains. Of the three, the agri-bonds died somewhere in the structure. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) said he could not bring that proposal forward.

The reduction in world-wide interest rates has alleviated the need for the Government to do something about direct financing of farmers, but we still have many more farm bankruptcies than we should have. It is not just the poor farmer who is going under; in many cases, the most efficient and aggressive farmers are affected by this lack of financing. The Government has failed to do anything about the need to allow farmers to survive because of the financial structure of the country. It seems to me that the responsibility for bankruptcies in the farm sector, as well as in all other sectors, should not necessarily always fall on the borrower. The time has come to start telling lending institutions that they must take half the risk, that if there is a bankruptcy they will only get half their money back and the bankrupt should have the right to keep some of it. We need to look at that kind of financial structure