

Government Orders

There is talk that some of the \$300 million transition fund that will be spent over the next six years will be going to eastern farmers although that has not exactly been clarified. There are some problems with respect to the allocation of these funds. It has yet to be decided the exact specifics of the allocation, but we have heard that approximately \$100 million of the \$300 million may be earmarked for farmers. This would allow farmers to develop new marketing strategies for grains and allow for increased diversification, especially crops such as peas, lentils and beans will be common as farmers shy away from planting cereal crops when prices are falling.

Also, one is likely to see the development of value added in the processing industry. Certainly this is the result that we would like to see. We were trying to focus on the positive developments in the industry and we are encouraged to see farmers responding to market conditions and no longer planting crops based on eschewed or artificial returns for their product.

The Reform Party has expressed some concerns over the implementation of these proposed changes. Although the bill does not specifically set out the catchment areas, it is quite probable that they will be the west coast, the east coast, the United States and Churchill.

The use of the port of Churchill as part of the catchment area may be problematic. In 1994 the port posted a loss of \$6 million. Traffic grew by 11 per cent with 322,000 tonnes being shipped, but this was only two-thirds of the volume Churchill needed to break even on operating expenses.

We need clarification from the government and the minister of agriculture on what they are going to do to solve the Churchill problem.

As I have already stated, the changes to the pooling system are just the first of many changes that should be made to the Canadian Wheat Board. My colleague from Vegreville indicated our concern that the first step be the democratization of the Canadian Wheat Board. The government has not heeded that suggestion and is dealing with some areas which we can support and others which we cannot.

However, there is no doubt that in talking to farmers we have heard their expression of concern regarding its marketing practices.

As outlined by the member for Vegreville on many occasions, the wheat board has a monopoly on the buy side but certainly not on the sell side. Farmers must sell through the board any wheat or barley being sold for export and what is being used for domestic purposes in Canada. Farmers do not have the option to sell wheat directly to points within the United States without going through the board and farmers who do sell across the border do so illegally and are open to criminal charges unless they go through the offices of the Canadian Wheat Board.

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All farmers want is an open system that is free from government over-regulation and restrictions. It is clear it is not the bureaucrats that want to improve the system but it is individuals who have to work directly within the system and have a vested economic interest in improvements.

While the Canadian Wheat Board would argue that its advisory committee, which is made up of 11 farmer elected bodies, serves the purpose of providing a link between farmers and the Canadian Wheat Board, I would suggest that it is nothing more than a token gesture. The advisory committee does not have the clout or the power to implement the changes necessary to bring the board into the 21st century. Farmers have the know how to make the wheat board effective. A farmer elected board, not an advisory committee, is needed to serve the interests of farmers.

It is noteworthy that we are also starting to hear rumblings from the provinces regarding the Canadian Wheat Board. First we heard that Alberta's minister of agriculture is interested in having a plebiscite on the dual marketing of grain. Then last week the minister of agriculture for Manitoba, Mr. Harry Enns, suggested that he would not be opposed to a modification in the role of the Canadian Wheat Board if it would improve opportunities for farmers to sell wheat into the United States.

I really believe that the Canadian Wheat Board is agreeable to investigating reforms to make it more effective in the 1990s. The government has no choice but to respond to these concerns. From the first day Reformers arrived in the House we have suggested serious modifications to the board with respect to its marketing of grain. Bill C-92 is more or less tinkering with the Canadian Wheat Board but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

I want to assure the House that Reformers will support Bill C-92. We have said this before and we will say it again. The globalization of world trade markets and the removal of trade barriers and subsidies make it imperative that Canadian farmers, whether they are in the supply managed sector or in grain farming, be prepared for changing conditions. In a small way Bill C-92 is helping farmers make the transition to the realities of the NAFTA and the globalization of marketing around the world.

The Liberal government is often shortsighted, trying to patch flat tires when they should be buying new tires or maybe even designing a new automobile. The future is bright for grain farmers if the government can be in step and be as progressive as the farmers are.

In closing, I would suggest that the Canadian Wheat Board should provide more options for farmers. It should be in touch with the 1990s. The board wants to be and farmers want to be. The only barrier is the minister of agriculture and the Liberal government.