

Supply

Mr. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question. Obviously the harmonization of regulations that has been going on since the government took office has brought down our standards to be more in line with those of the United States. Canadians can no longer afford to brag that we have the highest quality standards of any nation in the world. This is reflected not only in terms of fruit and vegetables but also in our grains.

We are equally alarmed that the government would bring in a system through the free trade agreement whereby a load of grain coming into Canada does not have to show the grade or the quality of that grain. All it needs is an end user certificate. It could be some very low quality grain that is brought in here in a series of truck loads simply to break and undermine a price structure that exists within our market-place. I think we should insist on having those grades and the quality shown on those end user certificates.

I would also like to comment very briefly on the snapback provision. The member is absolutely right in terms of the tender fruit harvest, in particular strawberries, cherries or peaches, because we have a price structure established at the start of a harvest season. If you have a few truck loads of lower grade quality dumped on the market-place, the price is tremendously undermined and that price normally remains in effect for the rest of the season and ends up with our own producers being forced into bankruptcy or whatever.

• (1600)

A few moments ago I quoted a man to whom I listened very attentively last Friday. He spoke about the concentration of power in the market-place, the power of the big multinational corporations and what they are doing to the Canadian agriculture industry. He was very firm in his resolve that the producers themselves must have a counterbalance and a counterbalancing force in the market-place to compete against these people. It is only through structures that we have here in Canada, the marketing board and the wheat board that we are able to do that. It would be a shame if these were ever traded away such as this present government is doing.

Mr. Gustafson: Mr. Speaker, I have just a couple of comments on the remarks of the member for Lambton—Middlesex. First of all, it is obvious that he is not familiar with the situation in the western prairies especially with regard to wheat and Durum and to the export of Durum wheat to the United States. We have had record exports of the best high quality Durum wheat. Also, Canadian wheat producers can compete in the international market-place. We have without a doubt the best hard red spring wheat in the world. While we have been facing some problems in the international market-place, there is no question about that, there has never been a government in the history of this country that has stood in for the farmers like this present government. I think it would be well if the member would research his material a little better before making statements to this effect.

Mr. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I should advise my colleague on the other side that I am a wheat producer, maybe not Durum wheat but I am a wheat producer. In fact, about 186,000 tonnes were exported to the United States this year which is up substantially from previous years precisely because of the high quality of that wheat. The quality of that wheat is a credit to the Canadian producers who produced it.

I would like also to point out to him that five prairie farm organizations wrote to the Minister of Agriculture requesting action against this American action. This has not been forthcoming at this time. I would ask my colleague on the other side to put pressure on the Minister of Agriculture and his two assistants. They have three part-time ministers over there. I hope between all three of them they will bring a stop to these actions and protect the interests of our own Canadian producers.

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise to speak again in this House on the question of the future of agriculture and how this government's actions are making a much tougher and insecure environment for the farming communities of Canada.

Today particularly it is interesting that we are finally getting around to talking in a concerted kind of way about the effects of the recent free trade agreement which has now run for virtually a whole year. I think some of the chickens are really starting to come home to roost, especially in the agriculture community.