

Canada Agricultural Products Standards Act

third reading. That is what he intends to do once you have put the motion, as you were about to do, we are therefore respectfully prepared to listen to you.

[English]

Mr. Nielsen: She read it.

Madam Speaker: For the benefit of the Hon. Member for Yukon, the debate is to take place only when the third reading is proposed, and I was reading the second formula in order to introduce the third reading.

Mr. Whelan moved that the Bill be read the third time and do pass.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Whelan: Madam Speaker, it is with concern for consumers—

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. After two days of high-jacking by the Tories on this closure motion, 24 of their Members are missing. That is just for the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): That of course is not a point of order. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture has the floor.

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, when I am talking about the industry I am referring to everyone who produces, transports, trades or sells perishable fruits or vegetables. That includes in Canada—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. I wonder if the Hon. Members would want the House to revert to its usual calm, so that we could all hear the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Whelan: That includes something like 200,000 people across this country.

These people are responsible for providing Canadians with a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables year round. It is a big job when you consider that most of the produce they handle is highly perishable. Last year they imported and distributed \$1.1 billion worth of fruits and nuts, and some \$600 million worth of vegetables.

Their job has been made easier in recent years by advances in refrigeration and cold-storage methods, and by improvement in the transportation system. Unfortunately, the legislation that regulates the industry has not advanced as quickly as the industry itself has.

The fruit and vegetable industry is in need of tighter regulations—regulations that will help ensure that costly delays and interruptions do not occur in the delivery of fresh produce, from the producer to the consumer.

That is why we have before us for third reading, Bill C-98, a Bill to amend the Canadian Agricultural Products Standard Act, commonly known as the CAPS Act.

This Bill has received first and second reading in the past month and passed through the committee stage last week, where the Canadian Fruit Wholesalers Association and the Canadian Horticultural Council spoke in support of the Bill. The speed with which this Bill was passed, Mr. Speaker, is to be noted. It won all Party agreement in just three meetings of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, which speaks for the soundness and the importance of the proposed amendments.

Bill C-98 is an important Bill for the industry. It is important because it would give the CAPS Act the legal power necessary to regulate the terms and conditions under which the fruit and vegetable trade in Canada can operate efficiently for the benefit of producers and consumers.

One of the most significant amendments concerns a board of arbitration to resolve disputes between buyers and sellers of fresh produce. When one Party is unhappy with the arrival condition of a shipment, if they feel that the shipment is not in as good a condition as it should be, and when the buyer rejects the delivered goods the arbitration procedure is recognized by the industry as an effective means of handling such disputes.

The board of arbitration has continued to operate on a voluntary basis in settling disputes since the previous legislation was declared invalid in 1974. But without legal powers, the board has not been able to do its job effectively. There have, for instance, been cases of parties ignoring decisions which the board could not enforce.

You must realize that when you are dealing with highly perishable products that must travel long distances, it is necessary that an arbitration board be able to act quickly and with authority. Otherwise, the products spoil while the squabbling goes on. While they are arguing back and forth trying to negotiate, trying to deal, trying to do all kinds of things, the fresh produce deteriorates until, in some instances, it is not marketable.

The board of arbitration would give dealers an avenue of recourse. It would examine complaints about quality, packaging, storage, transportation and preservation of fruits and vegetables on the basis of standards and regulations made pursuant to the amendment of the CAPS Act. These regulations are currently being drawn up by a committee composed of both industry and Government members. Therefore, we can be sure that any new regulation will be practical enough for the industry to follow.

As you are probably aware, the United States is our major trading partner in fruits and vegetables. We are their largest customer. The United States operates an arbitration system to handle complaints where Canadian shippers are involved. It is only reasonable that Canada should provide a similar service to settle disputes with our biggest trading partner.

Three other amendments to the CAPS Act concern the licensing and bonding of dealers in fresh fruits and vegetables.