

Government Orders

There is need for consultation. Certainly my concern with that amendment is that by putting it in the act it may lead to more consultation than is necessary. I say that because in this case the check off is refundable. Because of its refundable nature I suggest that when the research foundation is setting the level of funding it should be careful to make sure that the level is reasonable.

Because of the refundable nature I think this amendment is not needed and may cause a lot of extra bureaucracy beyond what is necessary. For this reason I do not think I can support this amendment, although I do recognize the need for consultation.

Another concern is that it still leaves the power to make the decision in terms of the level of the check off in the hands of the governor in council. The power should be left strictly in the hands of the Western Grains Research Foundation, the organization that will allocate the funding for research. For that reason I cannot support that amendment.

Amendment No. 4 is the Reform amendment which, as the Bloc member has stated very clearly and very well, would simplify the process that farmers would have to go through in order to get a refund for their research funding.

This amendment would put on the permit book application form, which every grain farmer receives every year, another box and require the farmer to check off the box if they want to get a refund on their check off for this particular year.

Some argue that it is really not a problem for a farmer to write a letter for a check off. As a grain farmer I know that farmers are inundated with stacks of letters and requests, a tremendous amount of book work they do not ask for. This would just be another piece of paper, another duty, another responsibility, another process they would have to go through to do business. I think there is far too much government interference right now. Certainly farmers would appreciate this simplification of the process. I believe simplifying the process of refund would be very worthwhile in this bill.

Amendment No. 5 put forth by the NDP is really asking for the wheat board to have complete control to interfere with check offs that are presently in place. For example, right now the western barley growers have a refundable check off through the Alberta Barley Commission. Barley farmers selling barley in Alberta already have a check off in place. This amendment would require that the people selling barley would have a check off by the wheat board as well as by the Alberta Barley Commission. For that reason it would cause a double check off or would cause the barley growers to give up their check off.

• (1545)

It is a general Reform principle that the closer to the people one can put decision making, the better the decision will be. In this case I believe it would be better to leave it in the hands of the barley producers in Alberta, just as an example, instead of requiring that all the check offs are done through the Canadian Wheat Board.

I cannot and will not support this amendment because it is just another move to put the power in the hands of this huge bureaucratic monopoly. I can in no way endorse that. Leave it in the hands of the Alberta Barley Commission for example.

I will leave my comments at that. I certainly look forward to speaking on this bill again at third reading.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this grouping of amendments.

One is from the member for Frontenac. He proposes to set up a group with whom the wheat board would consult before setting the rate of the deductions that are provided for under this act. I commend the hon. member for his concern about consultation. However I remind him and the House that there is a group that provides consultation and advice to the board now. It is the advisory committee and the board would be asking for that group's advice.

The board will also be asking for advice and recommendations from the Western Grain Research Fund. It makes certain there is no duplication in the research efforts that go into plant breeding and the research programs that gravitate around plant breeding, whether it is to establish what methods and levels of fertilization should be utilized or what genetic changes should be searched for in order to avoid disease and to get better productivity and yields and to come to fruition in a shorter growing period.

Therefore there is in place already the kind of organization the hon. member for Frontenac envisions. I am sure it will be put to that purpose.

With regard to Motion No. 4, essentially the member for Vegreville is proposing to make it fairly simple for people to opt out of paying into this program. I have no personal problems with that. I would remind the hon. member that if he is going to support the idea of raising money for research through check offs that asking people if they want to save some money when they are applying for their permit book will almost always get the response: "Of course I want to save some money. I will not bother allowing the check off to occur". It will depend on how that part of the application form is drawn to the farmers' attention as to whether they do or do not decide to participate in the check off.