

Canagrex Act

Mr. Whelan: Because the railways, highways and airports were closer.

Mr. Epp: That is right. That is the only airport on the prairies—

Mr. Whelan: The only one that size.

Mr. Epp: What is happening with the FFMC today? Does the hon. member for Nanaimo-Alberni (Mr. Miller) know what the fishermen have experienced this year? The FFMC has made money this year.

Mr. Miller: Good.

Mr. Epp: Does the hon. member know what was done with the money? It was withheld from the fishermen. The amount was \$2.8 million. Why was it withheld? The fishermen have to get geared up for 1982. The corporation withheld \$2.8 million. In the past it held back \$350,000 for the next year's operation, but this time the corporation held back \$2.8 million and is now telling fishermen it needs it because it does not know what the market will be. That is devastating to those fishermen.

Mr. Miller: Tell us about the Nickersons and the \$15 million the government had to bail them out with.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Go back to sleep.

Mr. Miller: I am telling you it failed.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. gentleman wants to speak, would you arrange with his House leader that he be given time?

The point I am making is that Crown corporations can have a function, but there must be constant vigilance because they do not have the bottom line, which was mentioned earlier, of losing their own money. When they start losing their own money, that is when it starts hurting.

I have spoken to a number of provincial people about the marketing of Canada's agricultural products, and I think among the provinces there is a general feeling that we need a co-ordinating body. There has been much work done on this, but what is happening now is that we are sending mixed signals internationally. A province will market pork, for instance, in Japan at a certain price, but the buyers know what the situation is in Canada. They know that another provincial representative will come and offer another price. Pork producers are competing against each other within Canada, so co-ordination is needed. I suggest to the minister that there must be more agreement. Agriculture is a shared responsibility. There must be very close co-operation between his department and provincial agriculture departments.

When the minister announced Canagrex, a constituent of mine who is active in the cow-calf producers' association in Manitoba came to me and we talked about Canagrex. We did not know what it was. It had not been put into legislative form. He told me that contacts had already been made. Small farmers in Manitoba have joined together simply for survival.

He pointed out—this was back in May of 1981—that through his association with the cow-calf operators he had had contact with a person in Winnipeg who was in the export business. He was told there was a market for 300 metric tons of kosher beef, which the State of Israel was getting from Ireland. That is a market we could get. The product is grass fed beef. It was calculated that this amount of beef would result in the raising of approximately 240,000 head per year, which is a tremendous number. That market was not necessarily open to Canadian producers only, but we could get into that market, and that is the important thing. My constituent and his farm colleagues, local people, were trying to find some vehicle to get into that market. They wanted to know how they could move their beef and get back into a cash position. We all know what the cash flow position of beef producers is today.

I say to the minister that Canagrex should be in a position to deal with matters of this kind. Canagrex should not take over the operation because "We know what is best for you", but it should give advice and help and facilitate sales rather than take them over. I think it is important that that be considered carefully when we are setting up Canagrex.

I said I would be brief today. When the minister brings this Canagrex bill to the committee, I suggest he looks at our suggestions. If they can improve the bill and the operation of Canagrex, let him accept them rather than go through the turmoil we went through, for instance, in relation to the FFMC. We went through a lot of turmoil. Many people were disappointed until the corporation was shaken down into place. Even today there are problems, but I suggest we should learn from experience. We should learn from the expertise in the private market and also help the private market sell Canada's agricultural products, rather than look at Canagrex as the vehicle which is to do all things for all people in the agricultural field.

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to wind up the debate for the official opposition—

Mr. Miller: And it was just getting good too.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): —in the hope that this matter can go to committee because there are a number of matters which must be examined.

I listened in the House when the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) made his speech introducing this bill. I listened to him very carefully. He expressed great optimism about Canagrex and about what it would do in the market. I do not mean to be unkind to the minister.

Mr. Whelan: Not you, Walter.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The minister knows that. My mother-in-law thinks the world of the minister—but she is not a farmer!

I listened to the minister's words of optimism about Canagrex. Afterwards I went to my office, and I received a call from a constituent of mine who had also listened to the