

*Private Members' Business*

That study will allow us and all interested parties to share a common vision and to reaffirm our determination even our commitment to meeting consumer demand, especially for healthy and nutritious products.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to maintaining a strong and healthy agri-food industry in Canada. To that end, we will establish a national strategic framework for developing policies based on Canadians' own characteristics and success stories while keeping a confident vision of the future.

[English]

**Mr. Jack Shields (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade):** Mr. Speaker, I am indeed pleased today to have this opportunity to talk about workers' co-ops and the work that this government has been doing with the co-operative sector.

Co-operatives are an important sector of the Canadian economy. There are approximately 12 million Canadians who are members of co-operatives whose combined assets are more than \$70 billion and who conduct \$14 billion in business every year.

There are co-ops in every part of Canada and in virtually every line of business. They are indeed major players in the grain trade, the dairy and poultry industries, and banking. They are also active in fisheries, housing, child care, health care and many other fields. Some of Canada's largest businesses are run by co-operatives. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, for example, Canada's biggest co-op, ranks sixty-sixth on *The Financial Post*, 500 listed for 1988. There were also 17 other co-ops including the Alberta Wheat Pool, United Grain Growers, Manitoba Pool Elevators, and several dairy pools among the 500 companies listed.

Co-operatives perform even better on *The Financial Post* ranking of financial institutions. It might surprise the House to learn that there were 19 credit unions in *caisses populaires* among the top 100, with the Desjardins Confederation in sixth place over all.

In 1988 a co-op opened Canada's first heavy oil upgrader in Regina. This major undertaking opened on time and within budget. All this proves that co-operatives are viable enterprises that are able to compete with private sector corporations. They compete not only in agriculture and banking but also in fields such as forest-

ry, fisheries, retailing, petroleum, fertilizers, building material, and machinery sales. They are also active in services such as child care, health care, housing, communications, and even funerals.

Speaking of child care co-ops, they were the subject of a recent study by the federal government's co-operative secretariat. This study found that child care co-ops offer significant benefits for parents and their children. They encourage parental involvement in the education system, provide cost effective quality child care, and offer development and opportunities for both parents and the child. According to this study there were 469 child care co-ops in Canada in 1986, with 19,603 members and 944 staff. We can expect to see more co-operative day care centres in pre-schools in the future.

This government has taken an active interest in the co-operative sector. In 1984 the Prime Minister appointed the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board as minister responsible for liaison with the co-operative sector. In 1987 the government established the co-operatives secretariat to act as a focal point for the government's relations with the co-op sector. Then we set up the minister's advisory committee made up of senior representatives of the sector. This committee advises the minister on the potential impact of government policies and programs on co-ops. To complete the infrastructure this government created the interdepartmental committee. This body co-ordinates government activities in relation to the co-op sector.

The government set up the infrastructure but it did not stop there. The minister has co-hosted three federal-provincial territorial conferences of ministers responsible for co-operatives. That is action. The first was held in Regina in 1985, the second in Ottawa in 1986, and the third in Halifax in 1988. Recently the minister held the fourth conference in Montreal.

What makes the Ottawa member's motion especially timely is that the ministers discussed workers' co-ops at their latest conference. Last year in Halifax the ministers directed their officials to work together with officials of the co-op sector to develop a strategy for the development of workers' co-ops. The federal minister responsible for co-ops said on that occasion that workers' co-ops "would create jobs and give people a chance to become involved in making business decisions". He also said it