

Private Members' Business

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Well, it is very unlikely that we are going to see the Americans raising their standards to our standards.

Mr. Boyer: Why?

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): The number of producers in the United States is significantly higher than the number of producers in Canada and the number of products available is significantly higher than those available in Canada.

What we need is a new method of pesticide registration to ensure that questions of health and environmental effects are more effectively put into the technical and economic equation. The costs and risks of pesticide use must be determined and research must be conducted into additive effects of chemicals on the environment, the users, and the consumers.

Users and consumers must be fully informed of the risks they face, and that includes adequate labelling of pesticide products to include health assessments. Food labelling must also include additives and the probable presence of pesticide residues in food irradiation. All those things would assist in ensuring that consumers are well aware of the procedures to which their foods have been subjected.

It would be useful also, as many have called for, if the government would create a new classification for fresh and processed foods which are pesticide free or organic foods which ensure that the consumers are well aware of the lack of presence of pesticides in some of the products that are available.

One of the serious problems that has arisen with regards to pesticides and chemical additives, as raised in the motion, is that we have very little knowledge of the cumulative effect of the various pesticides and chemical additives in our food today. There is a notorious chemical soup of products and additives out there and we really have very little understanding of how they all fit together.

Tests which are generally conducted are tests about the toxic nature of one product being used alone, separate from all others. What scientists see from these toxicity studies is the specific result of using just one chemical, one pesticide, or one additive. What Pollution Probe has called for is a significant exploration of the

interaction between chemicals and the total chemical load on the population from pesticides, food additives, and the seemingly endless list of industrial chemicals that are available.

The number of pesticides alone is formidable. More than 600 of them are used throughout the world and about 220 are currently approved in Canada. Because so many factors, including pesticides, chemical additives and many other things that are present in our environment, contribute to the health difficulties that people face, we need another way of assessing toxicity and of testing for chemicals other than just concentrating on one single commodity at any given time. There are many things that the government could do to place a higher priority on the health of Canadians in this context.

As I have mentioned, first of all we need a more public process for the assessment of regulating pesticides and food additives and we need to ensure that we not only perform risk benefit considerations, that we do not face off health and economic matters, but indeed that we ask the real questions as to what risk these products give rise to.

We must pay particular attention to the compounding effects on all of the various chemicals utilized at different stages of our food production process. We must find out what is happening. We must conduct research on the cumulative effects of food additives and chemicals. This would be a critical step to take.

In conclusion, I would say that the government should take action on this immediately.

Mr. Jack Shields (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the proposal before us today is to consider whether the government should undertake research on the cumulative or combined effects of food additives and pest control products in the Canadian food supply.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure all members of the House are aware, rigorous controls are in effect with regard to both pesticides and food additives. For example, pesticide products are registered in Canada under the Pest Control Products Act. This act is administered by Agriculture Canada with registration of products occurring only after extensive consultation with various other government departments, including the Department of National Health and Welfare, and Environment Canada.