

*Agriculture*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** I must interrupt the hon. member as his allotted time has expired.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Ostiguy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture):** Mr. Speaker, for the second time this week agriculture is the subject of debate in the House. To some extent I deplore today the fact that we were to appear before the agriculture committee to put more stress still on the beneficial effects of Bill C-46, the Meat Import Act. The motion introduced by the hon. member of the New Democratic Party contains six points, but I think that its main purpose is to say that the government should encourage the establishment of national agencies for the orderly marketing of all farm commodities. Surely the House is aware of the fact that we have in excess of one hundred marketing agencies, either federal or provincial.

Of course, through the National Farm Products Marketing Council, the federal government is responsible for three national marketing agencies, namely the Egg Marketing Agency, the Chicken Marketing Agency and the Turkey Marketing Agency. In addition, a few years ago the government established the Canadian Wheat Board and, more recently, the Canadian Dairy Commission. It is known that these marketing agencies have been a boon to Canadian farmers, perhaps more so in the case of milk since Canada is known for producing huge quantities of milk and dairy products which we sell on international markets. The Canadian Dairy Commission was not set up by milk producers. Heaven knows it was not a cinch! Suffice to recall the years 1974 and 1975 when farmers marched before the Parliament Buildings in groups, in huge delegations, to demonstrate and even decry the agricultural policies of those days. Since then, of course, the Canadian Dairy Commission has had very beneficial results, and I think that farmers who are now marketing dairy products would not leave that field under any consideration.

● (1700)

A while ago, the previous speaker referred to a farmer in his constituency who phoned him this week to complain that he had to pay \$1,000 for a drum of grain corn spray, but the member forgot to say that ten years ago, the same drum might have cost \$500. Ten years ago, grain corn cost \$100 per ton compared to \$175 today. He did not mention that fact. I referred to milk a moment ago. In 1968-70, milk cost \$2 or \$2.10 per hundredweight. At present, with the new indexation formula put forward by the Canadian Dairy Commission, the dairy producer gets \$16 or \$17—and the amount increases every three months—or even \$18 per hundredweight.

Production costs have increased, of course, but the selling price of the finished product has also gone up substantially. Everyone knows that the profits derived from the orderly marketing of products by those boards and commissions are used to prevent the duplication of marketing services by

providing leadership to implement and enforce quality standards, to seek and develop new outlets and markets. Those boards advise producers and take care of promotion and publicity so as to increase the sales while guaranteeing to consumers a security of supply at reasonable prices and to producers a fair return for their investment, their work and their production costs. Mr. Speaker, I think that it is most important that I deal briefly with the protection which should be granted to farming, so that the farmer will get a fair return for his product, but there is also the consumer at the other end.

It must not be forgotten that in this vast country where our agricultural industry stands as one of the most prosperous in the western world, a mere 5 per cent of our farmers are living from the farm while the other 95 per cent are just plain consumers. This I have been privileged to see some weeks ago, when we had meetings with the various farm groups from each and every Canadian province. The Canadian Consumers' Association went on record as stating that farm prices were too high, especially with regard to milk, butter and cheese.

I think that what the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Department of Agriculture have been trying to do during this past decade and have very well succeeded in doing has been to make sure that farmers get decent income while providing consumers with a healthy and stable supply of goods at competitive prices. And this is why recently, Canadian and even international statistics have shown that of all industrialized countries Canada still had the cheapest food basket. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that we have very good farmers, very good producers, but they must keep on being more efficient, and this is important. They must be increasingly efficient. Agriculture Canada, thanks to budget appropriations for research, aims at helping these farmers produce more, in order to lower production costs and, of course, protect consumers across the land.

These national marketing boards, at least the three that come under the National Farm Products Marketing Council and the Canadian Dairy Commission, have the authority to regulate supplies. This means they can monitor production to make sure that production levels meet consumer needs so that the market is never allowed to be glutted, as I will indicate later in the case of pork. It is a matter of more or less matching supply and demand, because these are the two main forces regulating the so-called free market. However, Mr. Speaker, we know about the controversy with respect to supply management. To put it mildly, the marketing boards have been widely discussed and, I feel, will continue to be for quite some time to come.

We live in a free society within the capitalistic system, where success is almost always linked with the concept of free competition. This of course is the law of efficiency, the guarantee of success. In the pork industry, for instance, the hon. member who spoke before me referred to the price of pork in food stores. Of course, consumers enjoy very low prices for