

*Government Orders*

The Canadian government currently provides between \$17.4 and \$17.5 million. Consequently, a total amount of about \$22 million could be allocated to research on wheat and barley in the four western provinces. Again, my fear is that cabinet might decide to increase farmers' payments and lower the federal government's contribution. Should that happen, farmers would have to fund a greater proportion of the research and development budget. I may recall that in a speech made here in the House, Eugene Whelan, a former Liberal Minister of Agriculture, who has made quite a name for himself throughout the world, said that there is a return of seven dollars on every dollar invested in research and development in the agricultural industry.

The government should invest now in research and development, because no bank in Canada will give us a better return on our investment. The government could, of course, take advantage of this opportunity to cut its research budget as a deficit reduction measure, in the knowledge that it can tap the incomes of grain producers for the funding it needs.

To preclude this possibility, we in the Bloc Québécois suggest that the CWB conduct consultations with individuals and organizations that represent certificate holders so that the board itself can make recommendations on the rate of deduction to the Governor in Council, who would then consider such recommendations when the time comes to fix the rate as provided in subsection (1) of the Act. In addition to providing safeguards for producers, this would also benefit consumers who, in the end, have to pay, because if the producers have to spend more on research, consumer prices may very well be affected.

This amendment will require genuine consultations with the principal parties, people in the industry who are in the best position to know what a reasonable deduction would be and what our research and development needs are. In any case, I may remind the House that farm producers in the four Western provinces are entirely free to say yes or no to this voluntary deduction, which will be used to collect \$4.5 million for research and development. Should the Governor in Council start throwing his weight around, I assume farm producers will simply decide not to participate.

● (1535)

The amendment also gives producers some say in determining the amount of the deduction, and since this bill is a response to their initiative, it is entirely fair that this should be the case.

We are aware that the Canadian Wheat Board, an agency established to defend the interests of producers, consults producers on decisions as important as setting the deduction rate. But this is only to make it automatic and include it in Bill C-50.

I would go as far as saying that our amendment proposal will give the Canadian Wheat Board enhanced legitimacy vis-à-vis the Governor in Council, as it should be the case on the issue before us today.

My proposal is clear: to allow those who are the most qualified to set the rate of deduction do so. These are my arguments in favour of Motion No. 1 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague from Lotbinière, who sits with me on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, for seconding Motions Nos. 1 and 2.

Now, turning to the famous Motion No. 4 put forward by the hon. member for Vegreville, it is important to note that this motion introduces two significant changes to Bill C-50. First, we eliminate the red tape and make life easier for producers.

I imagine that the situation is no different in Western Canada than in Quebec. In my riding, indeed everywhere in Quebec, producers and voters ask us ten times a week: "Why make things so complicated?" This is one such case. When it comes to withdrawing from the deductions plan, why make life difficult for our farm producers? What my colleague from the Reform Party, the hon. member for Vegreville, is proposing here makes a lot of sense. It will cut the red tape.

Motion No. 4 deals with the procedure for opting out of the voluntary deductions plan to support research. The bill provides for filing a separate notice to withdraw from the program, whereas it is suggested here that this notice be given in the permit book that producers have to fill in when they sell their crop to the board. There should be space provided at the bottom; you check off one or two boxes and there you have it.

This makes life easier for producers who do not wish to contribute to research, and spares doing unnecessary paperwork. But there should be a space provided specifically for this purpose inside the book, in order not to make life unduly difficult for the board.

I would like to conclude by saying that, with this amendment, producers will have to decide whether or not to continue contributing to the research fund at the wrong time of the year. That is to say, when they see their income for the year. But since this is the risk you take with a voluntary contribution plan, I will vote for this amendment.

● (1540)

[English]

**Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the three amendments in the first package today, amendments 1, 4 and 5.

I will start with amendment No.1 which puts in this bill a requirement for consultation with the people who would be affected by research done with the money collected through this fund established by the Canadian Wheat Board.