

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): The hon. member suggests something that I do not think he has thought through, whether Canada would be able to exist outside the world trading community, whether it be in dairy, eggs and poultry or whether it be in the industrial manufacturing area or the export of products throughout the world.

The hon. member is suggesting that Canada could exist independently. What I have said to the hon. member and continued to say as late as yesterday in discussions with the farm leaders, and the farm leaders in the supply managed areas agree, is we have a position that was developed jointly, a position we believe is in the best interests of consumers and producers in Canada and we will continue to pursue that position.

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Hon. Ralph Ferguson (Lambton—Middlesex): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture.

The minister should know that the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association estimates that if all gasolines in Canada contained 10 per cent ethanol it would require between 8 million and 10 million bushels of Canadian grain, which is almost one-fifth of our total annual production in Canada. Ethanol blended gasolines are already labelled environmentally friendly.

Why is this government dragging its feet in creating this huge new domestic market for Canadian grain that would also serve to clean up our environment?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member may be aware—and from his question he may not be aware—this government has been involved in developing ethanol production to be used in gasoline.

I can take the hon. member to two examples in the province of Saskatchewan that this federal government has been involved in. One happens to be Kerrobert with North West Food and Fuels where grains are used to produce alcohol.

The other happens to be in Langham, Saskatchewan in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, where the Department of Western Economic Diversification, the provincial government and Sask Pool are again involved in the production of ethanol to be used in gasoline and the by-products being used in a cattle feedlot operation.

This government has supported the production of ethanol from grains and will continue. There are provinces that are supporting the production, along with the federal government. We believe it is an important source. It is important for the environment. We look forward to continued co-operation and growth in this area.

Hon. Ralph Ferguson (Lambton—Middlesex): Madam Speaker, I am very much aware of the new plant at Langham, Saskatchewan, and one at Minnedosa, Manitoba and I am aware of some other smaller ones being built. But they will only serve a small fraction of our needs in Canada.

A 10 per cent ethanol blended gasoline would replace the octane enhancer methylcyclopentadienyl manganese tricarbonyl currently used in Canada. This substance attacks the nervous system of the human body and was banned in the United States in 1978. Evidence is mounting that the health of Canadians is being affected by these gasoline additives.

Will the minister act now to ban MMT in Canada and protect the lives of the Canadian people, particularly our children who are most vulnerable? When will this government get behind the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, give it full support and stop supporting a product that has been banned in other countries?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member is putting forward an outrageous hypothesis I do not agree with. There is no scientific evidence that would allow him to substantiate the accusations that he has made.

This government is interested in ethanol production. Ethanol production is important from two points: the environmental point and the ability to use a renewable resource.