

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, as always the policy of this government has been developed with stakeholders. The policy we have put forward, the enhancing and strengthening of article XI through the Uruguay round was developed with the supply managed industries and with the producers in Canada. We have not changed that position.

I can tell the hon. member, rather than receiving pressure to bring about change, I have been meeting with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary Madigan. I have been meeting with the European Commissioner of Agriculture, Ray McSharry. Rather than receiving pressure from the European Community, I received support for our position, because they believe there is an opportunity for Canada and the European Community to work together to clarify and strengthen article XI.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct my supplementary question to the Prime Minister. Canadian farmers want firm assurances from the Prime Minister. Can he promise us today that his government will protect and strengthen article XI of GATT that allows farmers to have quotas? Is he prepared to undertake not to sign any multilateral agreement that does not protect the quotas of Canadian farmers?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the hon. member must have missed by answer to his colleague. The same question was asked in another language.

I say to the hon. member that the policy of this government and what we have put forward in strengthening and enhancing article XI in the Uruguay round was developed with the producers in Canada, developed with provinces in Canada. It is there. We have not backed away. As I have said on other occasions, we are seeking alliances within the Uruguay round. The hon. member keeps shaking his finger and muttering things. I am not too sure whether he is interested or whether he is grandstanding.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture in the absence of the Minister for Grains and Oilseeds. Atlantic Canadian agriculture is in a very unfair position. For example, transportation costs for grain makes it 11.5 per cent more expensive to produce dairy products in Atlantic Canada than it does in Quebec, and 33 per cent more expensive to produce hogs than it does in Ontario.

This government has effectively reduced transportation assistance to Atlantic Canada by 60 per cent.

Will the minister now give assurance to this House that he will respond to the needs of Atlantic Canadian farmers and implement the Atlantic Canada feed policy proposal put forward by the Atlantic Farmers Council last June?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, without giving credibility to the numbers that my hon. friend has put forward, I can inform him, as he well knows, that under feed freight assistance the Government of Canada on behalf of Canadians provides assistance to the agricultural sector in Atlantic Canada. As he also knows, at a meeting of federal-provincial ministers of agriculture in Kananaskis last July there was a decision made by all ministers present that we would study the transportation system as it pertains to agriculture. That means the feed freight assistance system in Atlantic Canada; it means the western grain transportation system in western Canada.

We are studying that to see that the dollars we have put forward on behalf of the Canadian taxpayers through agriculture is being used in the best interests of producers, and that has the support of producers.

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, according to a proposal the Atlantic Farmers Council made, the federal expenditures in support of the agri-food industry over the past 10 years rose in Atlantic Canada by 4.3 per cent; in Ontario and Quebec by 9.2 per cent; and in the prairie provinces and western Canada 29.5 per cent.