

Agriculture

the provincial and the federal levels provide together a total amount of \$8.96. The minister said a moment ago that he wanted to be fair to all Canadian producers wherever they live.

This week we discussed Bill C-46 which is tabled before the House and deals with meat imports. I took part in the discussions in the committee of agriculture. I expressed my views and urged the minister to take into account in his policies the needs of Canadian producers, our structures, our climate, while reviewing to some extent the GATT agreements which might often work to our detriment.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak today of a type of farming in which I was involved for several years, namely potato farming. I would like to try to explain how a marketing agency works, its complexity, how long it can take to establish one and how much time is often required to convince producers of the need for such an agency. Since 1970, I have worked in close co-operation with potato farmers from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and Quebec, and we have held many meetings in Quebec City, Fredericton, Ottawa and Montreal and have achieved a fair degree of success.

Mr. Speaker, I recently attended a provincial potato growers convention held in Drummondville, Quebec, where producers agreed to abide by strict regulations, and it will no doubt surprise many to learn that Quebec producers agreed this year to set membership fees into the marketing agency at \$35 an acre. Regulations are very strict and the agency will control production, quality, production costs and marketing. I was personally very surprised to see this. Since 1970 producers have been working on the establishment of this marketing agency.

In 1974 I was involved in a study on production costs for seven types of crops. I think any type of farming requires a basic scientific study of its production costs. No farmer in Canada can hope to have an efficient operation if his production costs are not adequate. I was looking at the way these potato growers in Quebec were going about this. Quebec produces only 50 per cent of all potatoes consumed in the province and yet, even though there is no overproduction, growers got together and organized. I was comparing this to New Brunswick and P.E.I. New Brunswick produces 600 per cent of all potatoes consumed in that province and yet to date growers are not organized. The situation is about the same in P.E.I.

Now that growers in Quebec are well organized, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that meetings between the five eastern provinces will continue so that this provincial marketing agency can lead to the establishment of a national agency. Because in my view, Mr. Speaker, we will still have to find a way to market our commodities from one province to another. I also considered how Quebec producers organized themselves to market their products. I looked more fully into the legislation or the services provided by the Department of Agriculture through subsidies

which have transformed potato production in the province of Quebec. I say this, Mr. Speaker, because I believe it is possible and even desirable that a similar agency be set up in all other provinces.

I looked up the subsidies granted to producers by the Department of Agriculture for storage purposes. A few years ago, Quebec potato growers marketed their produce in the months of September and October, while the remainder of the year, potatoes had to be imported from other provinces or even from the United States. Thanks to the building of modern refrigerated storage facilities, Quebec growers now can market their produce practically year round, and washing facilities, also subsidized, have helped further improve the quality of the product. I think that we must pay tribute to the Department of Agriculture for these subsidies, given the fact that when the pre-washed potatoes from the U.S. were imported into Canada they were in direct competition with the Canadian produce and looked much better. The situation has changed in the past few years and these washing centres have a very high efficiency rating since pursuant to the policy of the Department of Agriculture, many producers are requested to bring in their production to these centres where it is classified, packed and delivered.

We must therefore keep up the good work and once again, Mr. Speaker, what is most important, indulge in consultation. This process must be intensified in order to sell the idea and convince additional producers that no matter in which area they live they must develop these marketing tools. There again I agree in part with the suggestion made by a member from the Opposition but with regard to the manner in which to get it done I disagree with him. It has to originate from the people concerned, Mr. Speaker, and I am convinced that something imposed on them would not be that efficient. That is evidenced within the marketing boards that are at present successfully serving the interests of Canadian producers and they also put to the test the efficiency of these producers since the production costs of these boards are figured out in a very scientific way and are related to very cost-efficient farms.

I do not yet see the Canadian farmer's situation as being disastrous. However, he will soon have to get organized and the government, as advised by the minister and his officials, has never been against any well-structured organization of the Canadian farmers. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield the floor for a period of five minutes to my colleague for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) who is in a position, I believe, to make interesting suggestions regarding the farmers of Canada.

● (1750)

[English]

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend and colleague on the Standing Committee for Agriculture, the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Dionne), who has given me a few minutes this evening. I spoke to him previously and although I pointed out to him that some