

Canagrex Act

I would like to expand further on the subject of imports. Up to the end of October, 1981, we imported approximately \$77 million worth of fresh tomatoes as well as \$43 million in tomato products. This represents a very big loss in foreign exchange to our country as well as a loss of many jobs.

The same is true for many other products. As of the end of October, 1981, we imported \$42 million worth of potatoes, \$2.6 million worth of frozen broccoli, \$21 million worth of onions and \$9.5 million worth of green onions. We had a surplus of onions last year in Canada yet we imported \$9.5 million worth of them. We imported \$14 million in carrots, \$23 million in green peppers, \$12.5 million in cauliflower. The list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

The government should be encouraging the Canadian consumer to purchase frozen vegetables which were grown in Canada. The Department of Agriculture should be involved in consumer education, perhaps through displaying special labels and posters. DREE, or whatever the program is now, should be working with the Department of Agriculture in the establishment of processing plants in Canada. The Department of Agriculture should be twisting the arms of the food chains to promote the sale of Canadian produce.

In Moose Jaw, not far from my riding, there is a very successful little greenhouse. It started out by employing people who were on social assistance. In its own little way, it has been able to provide employment for these 12 people who were previously on social assistance. They made use of their waste heaps. It has helped to make the city of Moose Jaw and the surrounding area self-sufficient in food. This greenhouse is an example of the great possibilities which exist for Canadian agriculture. I would encourage the government to consider further research and development in this area so that the fresh produce which we need can be grown in Canada.

As a result of new discoveries from investment in research and technology, many more of these greenhouses could be established in rural areas to enable self-sufficiency in green produce, even during winter. The trap that agriculture in Canada is now in—although it is a cliché—is that producers' costs of fuel, fertilizer, land, machinery and the cost of borrowing money are going up while the return on their investment and labour is reversing. As a result of these increased costs, the farmers' actual return on their investment has declined during the last number of years. The small producers in particular are being squeezed out. We are becoming more dependent on the large multinationals and foreign producers and farmers.

We must explore new directions for self-sufficiency in food if we are to cease being totally hooked into the international agricultural network which makes us dependent on those over whom we have no control.

It is my hope that this corporation which we are helping to establish today will play a role in exploring new ways to grow agricultural products in Canada. I hope Canagrex will play a role in making Canada self-sufficient in the food products we need for Canadians to survive.

At some stage we truly must begin to see how absurd our situation is. For example, we are buying tomatoes which are grown in Mexico and shipped up to Canada in huge semi-transporters. They are then stored in huge warehouses with large cooler and freezer compartments. They are sold in huge supermarkets on some of the most expensive real estate that exists. It is a wasteful way of getting tomatoes on our table. It is not energy efficient. It is not capital efficient, and it does not provide employment to Canadian producers.

● (1420)

Surely the capital which is now put into buying that semi-trailer and buying huge warehouses and huge shopping centres, if redirected to such operations as local greenhouses, could provide employment for Canadians and make us more energy and food self-sufficient. I suggest it would also produce more nutritious food. That is a new direction which must be explored.

I hope the government, and particularly Canagrex, can play an important role in developing this alternative system of agriculture, turn away from huge multinationals and from highly capital intensive forms of agriculture and toward a form of agriculture which is based on local conditions and needs. Such a form of agriculture would not be so energy and capital intensive and would produce the food that is immediately needed in and about communities. Such a system, as I mentioned before, could make small towns in Saskatchewan self-sufficient in produce during the winter.

I and other members of my party will say more about this line of thinking in various other debates to come. On the whole, we welcome the legislation before us. We hope it will do what it is hoped it will do. We will, however, be paying attention to make certain it will indeed be of benefit to the farmers and consumers of Canada and not just to some multinational corporation.

Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased I am able to speak in the debate on this bill brought forward by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). I have been reading about this in his speeches for about a year and a half now. The minister was even so kind as to come to the great constituency of Wetaskiwin and tell the good people there about some of his plans. I think he even mentioned Canagrex there.

Mr. Whelan: I missed you. You didn't show up.

Mr. Schellenberger: I thought I would leave the good citizens of Wetaskiwin to deal with the minister in such a way as not to need my help.

The speaker who just sat down mentioned that it is sheer madness—I think that is the term he used—to turn over much of the marketing and other operations which are now run by government to the private sector. I think many farmers on the prairies would question that term. They also would question whether we should be heading in the direction we are now with much of the legislation being proposed and some of the