

Pesticide Residue Contamination

other people, then we should have to pass an act establishing a standard basic price in order to get away from temporary regulations that may be modified overnight. At this time, that is what I fear most as to the bills on agriculture that we have been discussing. In my opinion, that procedure is being applied to every bill, and that is why I am worried.

When we talk with farmers they ask us: What will be the amounts of compensation in the future? As we are not aware of what they will be, as we are left completely in the dark, we can only answer: We have to wait, it is the minister who makes regulations. Well, if the minister wants to take that chance, he is the one who will have to account for his actions to the people. I think he is old enough to take his own responsibility and he will have to do it alone if he does not want to share it with the committee and the house. Then, we will say to the people: the law has been made thus. The majority has won and we have given the minister and his officials all the latitude needed to determine what compensation you may or may not receive according to what happens in agriculture.

● (3:30 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Ross Whicher (Bruce): I would like to speak on this bill, Mr. Speaker, because I had the opportunity of attending the committee while it was discussed. I want to join in the view expressed not only by many members present but also by the expert witnesses who appeared before the committee. I have enjoyed the speeches by two members of the opposition this afternoon. I realize that one who has had long experience in the field of opposition naturally has to say something against a bill regardless of whether it is good or bad.

This bill is something new as far as the Department of Agriculture is concerned. I would think that members who wish to be somewhat critical should nevertheless congratulate the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) for bringing it in. This is something that has never happened before in Canada. It was not possible for the government to pay to a farmer any sum of money he might be justified in receiving. If a pesticide firm or a farmer's neighbour made an error in the spreading of pesticide, the farmer affected could sue the pesticide firm or his neighbour. If the damage arose through no fault of the farmer, his neighbour or the pesticide firm, the farmer could not be compensated for his loss.

In this bill the government provides compensation to farmers whose agricultural products are contaminated by pesticide residue, as well as for appeals from compensation awards. The Minister of Agriculture and the government deserve credit for this. A great deal more could be done but this is a step in the right direction. The Canadian farmer with substantial losses will now have the opportunity to receive compensation from the government. The minister should be congratulated rather than criticized.

The hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth), although very mild in his criticism, was critical that the regulations had not been drawn up and the amount of compensation had not been decided. I point out that no regulations are written before a bill is passed by parliament. After the bill is passed the regulations will be drawn up by the Minister of Agriculture. The hon. member also suggested there was no provision for a review which would be fair to the farmer concerned. There are 264 members of this house including the Speaker, all of whom represent constituencies. If one of our constituents feels he is not getting a fair deal it will be up to us to look after his interests.

This is new legislation. I understand the Department of Agriculture has estimated the cost to be \$100,000. This bill is very important to anyone who suffers a loss through no fault of his own, of his neighbour or of the pesticide manufacturer.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I am going to disappoint the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher). He complained that it is almost a reflex action for members of the opposition to be critical of any legislation put forward by the government. Even before the hon. member made that suggestion, I had it in my notes to congratulate the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) for bringing in this legislation. I think the hon. member for Bruce is a bit unfair in his criticism. My colleague who spoke on this matter this afternoon extended congratulations in regard to this bill breaking a new trail in the field of agricultural legislation.

Action to deal with the problem of pesticides is long overdue. This bill is just the beginning in an area which is going to become to an increasing extent the responsibility of the government. The use of pesticides in agriculture is a fairly recent occurrence. I can see protests arising about problems of pollution, not only food pollution and other damage of that kind, but general