

*Canagrex Act*

There were also questions raised earlier as to whether there should be a separate Crown corporation at all to oversee and handle exports of our agricultural products, or whether this agency may do a better job if, as I just mentioned, it were a division of the Department of Agriculture. I believe this approach has merit, given the fact that Canagrex will be a much smaller body than was first anticipated. By being an agency of Agriculture Canada, Canagrex could have direct access to the resources, expertise and personnel of the department. A Crown corporation may not be necessary or be the best way to export our agricultural products.

Regardless of the form Canagrex takes, there is no question in my mind—and I know the minister is well aware of the fact—that we have some top men with the Department of Agriculture who have the drive and ability to give guidance and leadership to this new agency. If they are given the opportunity by the minister, I personally would have no difficulty in stating that this new body would have no real problems in overcoming those first difficult hurdles.

Other areas of concern centre around how this new proposed corporation, Canagrex, will be kept responsible to Parliament. This is an important concern. We know that a report will be submitted to Parliament each year through the Minister of Agriculture; and this is fine, but is this link strong enough to ensure adequate accountability? Perhaps it is, but if we create another Crown corporation, we must ensure it does not run away on us.

Perhaps one way to keep strict tabs on Canagrex would be to submit its yearly report to committee. We might also provide a sunset clause, which would mean that after five years its mandate would have to be renewed and its progress justified. To have its books open to the Auditor General each year would be another way of keeping control over the corporation.

As I have said before, the concept or principle of Bill C-85 is acceptable to most members. There is no problem with this aspect. Beyond accepting the general principle of promoting our exports, there are a number of provisions within the bill that deserve a passing note. As I said before, any bill that intends to help our agriculture industry and our farmers is always welcome. I believe it is time we entered the international market in a systematic and aggressive way. Recognizing that many of our small farms and farm industries lack any real expertise, knowledge and the financial resources to become effective exporters, the creation of Canagrex is a positive step in the right direction. Canagrex supposedly would enter into joint ventures with agricultural exporters by providing guarantees and loans. Co-ordination of the agriculture industry's exports is highly desirable and long overdue.

This umbrella corporation would also offer another service to our farmers. It would seek out and secure export contracts, long-term contracts, which hopefully would bring about stability of prices, increased production, and a ready-made and expanded market, all of which would hopefully do wonders to bring the industry out of its severe economic recession.

This aspect would be especially helpful to beef producers, given the fact that the prices in this industry are way down, as

is the demand for beef itself. Hopefully, with access to new international markets, beef prices would rise to better reflect the cost of production, yet remain competitive internationally. This aspect of C-85 is welcome, as long as the corporation ends up doing efficiently what it is designed to do.

Also, whether we care to admit it or not, the idea of state-to-state negotiated contracts is becoming the fashion these days. More and more countries prefer to handle trade through central agencies because of growing suspicion toward private organizations. Therefore, if we want to be competitive and aggressive in the marketing of our agricultural products abroad, then we must recognize the importance of this new form of marketing.

The idea of going for long-term contracts also warrants support, especially because of the clear benefits of stability of price for our producers as well as a secure market for our products. Also, it is clear that prospective customers are looking for long-term contracts as well so that their problem of supply will be minimized. Thus, a recognition of this aspect of exporting is important and positive.

I have briefly outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses of Bill C-85. I can only say that clause by clause examination in committee will hopefully make a good bill in principle and a better bill in detail.

In this respect, there is no question but that I find myself in agreement with the remarks of my hon. friend and colleague, the hon. member from Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) when he said earlier in this debate that the top priority of Canagrex should be, above everything else, concerned with the promotion and sale of our agricultural products to foreign countries and to fill a gap to make those sales which otherwise would not be made.

The committee stage and the clause by clause study will be most important to the passage of this bill, given some of the very worth-while proposals that have been mentioned during the course of this debate. During the committee hearings, it is very important that we have input, not only from Members of Parliament, but also input from industry, provincial representatives, people from other facets of agriculture, agriculture-related businesses, and other individuals or interested groups. I believe that this kind of input is most important and indeed imperative to make this a truly good bill. It would only remain then for the minister to be prepared to accept constructive changes and amendments, completely setting aside partisan politics. Political biases and decisions made for the sake of politics, and politics alone, would do a great disservice to our farmers who have enough on their minds trying to break even and stay solvent without having to put up with the added frustrations of self-serving politicians. Hopefully, this indeed will be the case during the committee meetings on this important bill, and I look forward to being in attendance at these meetings.

As I have said before, on many occasions, and I will say again, as one who made his living for many years serving the farmers and producers in my profession as a rural veterinarian, and knowing their problems first hand, if we want farmers to keep producing food for us we must ensure they make a buck.