

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak this morning on Bill C-266 sponsored by the member for Mackenzie.

I must tell the member for Mackenzie that this bill is really an untimely gesture in the history of the potato industry. Usually there is a demand for this type of legislation from producers or from the provinces. In this case I do not detect any support for a bill of this sort from producers, from provincial governments, or from departments of agriculture. It has been some time since there has been any kind of demand for an orderly marketing system for potatoes.

I remember back in the 1980s during an election campaign there was a move by the producers in Prince Edward Island and eastern Canada to set up an orderly marketing system. At that time there were some difficulties for a number of years in marketing potatoes for a fair price or for marketing potatoes for any price.

An effort was made by Parliament to initiate discussions that might lead to an orderly marketing system for potatoes. That effort died rather quickly. The demand for potatoes and the marketing problem they were experiencing in the late 1970s disappeared and the enthusiasm the producers had for an eastern potato marketing board waned pretty quickly. Basically the effort went nowhere.

In the early 1990s I am told, although I did not realize this until we looked into the background material for the bill, an effort was made nationally for an orderly marketing of potatoes. It also died because of lack of support.

Why is the bill being brought forward at this moment when the marketing of potatoes has never been better? The demand for potatoes has never been better and the prices paid to producers have rarely been higher. If we had twice as many potatoes in Prince Edward Island as we do now, we would be able to sell them all.

There is demand from Europe. We are getting calls from countries that until this year probably never knew Prince Edward Island existed. They are phoning our exporters looking for potatoes.

• (1145)

This is an unusual year for that kind of demand. Even without the drought or whatever affected the potato crop in Europe, the demand for the processing of potatoes is growing steadily year after year. The demand for table potatoes and for P.E.I. seed potatoes has rebounded from the PVY-n crisis.

The industry is in a very healthy position. There is no guarantee it will always be in a healthy position but if there are any free market farmers in Canada, the eastern Canadian potato producers have to be in that group. They have very rarely had to rely on government for any kind of stabilization or bailouts for their industry. They grew their own potatoes. They marketed their own potatoes. They exported their own potatoes and developed their own markets in South America and overseas in Algeria and the Middle East. They have been doing a tremendous job. They do not really see how government could assist them in any way in the selling of their crop.

In the whole situation mentioned earlier by a Bloc member with respect to free trade, GATT, NAFTA and so on, the potato industry is probably more ready for these efforts in bringing down trade barriers than any other commodity group in this country. It is that those in the potato industry have never been in favour of trade barriers. They have always had to rely on a free trade spirit in order to market their crop.

Even with that, since 1980, the last time there was a demand for this type of legislation, the number of acres of potatoes grown has come close to doubling. That is in the last 15 years. They have not only been able to market those potatoes; on a yearly basis, they have been able to increase their production and to sell everything they have had.

The only experience they have had with government has been as a result of the PVY-n crisis and it was thought they would not be able to market their potatoes in 1991 and 1992. The government assisted the growers in destroying thousands and thousands of pounds of potatoes for a certain price in order to relieve the market of potatoes in storage.

What happened a few months later was that there was a demand for the potatoes that were destroyed. They would have received a lot more money out in the marketplace than they did out of government. Any time the government has been associated with the market it tends to distort it. It is better left to the market system, especially these days. It is a free market commodity and has been doing quite well.

I am sorry I cannot lend any support to my colleague from the NDP for this bill. Basically there is no support from either the potato producers or the governments in eastern Canada.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on this private members' Bill C-266, an act respecting the orderly marketing of potatoes.

My speech has four main points. First, I will explain what this bill is about very briefly. Second, I will explain why this bill has failed in the past and will not be supported again in this House as we have seen from the speeches so far, in particular from the governing party. Third, I will outline the Reform Party's posi-