

Supply

• (1200)

Six months before closing down, a new building worth \$3,5 million was opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Now, the annual operating budget was only about \$1,3 million. The farm did not cost a lot to operate, but it was very productive and yielded very interesting results. In fact, it was just about to sign agreements with the private sector, but this was ignored, because cuts had to be made. I would not be surprised to hear that the real target was the farm at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, and that it has not been hit because closing down the military college was already quite enough.

Thus, the government did not want to add the experimental farm at Saint-Jean to the list, so it chose two others elsewhere, thinking that everybody would be satisfied and that they were free to cut. That, Mr. Speaker, is what we want to denounce.

Mr. Réjean Lefebvre (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the opposition motion introduced by my colleague, the member for Frontenac. In Quebec, since the general assembly on the rural sector in February 1991 and following the summit on agriculture in June 1992, we have seen the rural and agri-food sectors begin to join forces with the common goal of gaining a share in new markets. This was the expression used by the then president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, Jacques Proulx, and I use it today because it describes so well the vision which drives our agri-food sector.

The stakeholders in Quebec want to regain local markets and gain access to international ones. In this respect, one of the approaches that the agri-food system favoured at the summit held in Trois-Rivières consists in stepping up research, development and technology transfer, which are part of the strategy to gain a share in new markets. With Mr. Martin's budget, the Liberal government made cuts in research and development, which led to the closing of two research centres in Quebec, the La Pocatière and L'Assomption centres.

Once again, the federal government makes cuts unilaterally without taking into account the consensus of those most concerned. Quebec's agri-food sector is trying to adapt to the challenges it is facing at the end of this century and it will need all the help it can get. Research centres are a valuable tool.

Quebec's milk producers relied on research and development results from different sources in order to increase their herd's productivity, and they were very successful in doing so. As proof of this, Quebec's dairy herds are among the most productive in Canada and rank well at the international level.

This is a good example of Quebec's producers taking results of research and development and incorporating them into their day-to-day operations. The whole rural community benefits

from the research and development, which in turn ensures the community's survival.

On another connection, I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to the budgetary cuts made at the Food Production and Inspection Branch concerning the application of Agriculture Canada's activity plan. Since April 1, 1995, slaughterhouses recognized by the government have had to pay part of the cost of food inspections. These businesses must, as a prerequisite to their certification, conform to Canadian standards on the design of slaughtering and storage installations and, subsequently, to standards on the maintenance of sanitation.

Consequently, these are important investments, particularly for small businesses in rural communities which cannot take advantage of the economies of scale and the proximity of a sufficiently large market. Imposing charges for meat inspection is detrimental to small slaughterhouses. Moreover, it will penalize rural municipalities where these businesses are located. The government says it wants to create jobs, but adopts measures which jeopardize jobs. As an example, in my riding, there are two businesses which will have to clear this new hurdle, or close their doors. Some fifty jobs could disappear.

• (1205)

In a recent letter that I received on that issue, the Minister of Agriculture said that he was in favour of talks and cooperation with national sectoral stakeholders so that they could find some options relating to cost sharing, programs restructuring and changes in service delivery.

Should the minister not have waited to find solutions, in cooperation with stakeholders, before applying a tariffication? And how will he consider the duplication of inspection services, particularly between the Quebec Department of Agriculture and Agriculture Canada?

At the États généraux du monde rural, Quebec stakeholders as a whole wanted a shift of political powers from the top to the bottom. The minister could take advantage of this people's willingness to put an end to the duplication in this sector and to guarantee Quebecers that they will only have to fund one inspection service and that it will be non-partisan because administered entirely by the government.

Since my riding is made up of agricultural and forest areas, I would like to deal with the impact of the federal withdrawal from the funding of operations in private woodlots. In the Champlain riding alone, private woodlots harvesting provides direct and indirect jobs to several hundreds of people. Also, several municipal governments collect property taxes through developments and value added to private woodlots.

In 1992-93, in Quebec, the federal funding of private woodlots generated \$71 million in profits for businesses and operators, \$30 million in salaries and \$12 million in taxes going back