

Private Members' Business

the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs was responding publicly to it today, of American products coming into Canada that do not comply with Canadian labelling requirements. For example, there are boxes of cereal on which the Americans talk about cholesterol, but we cannot in this country even use that word on a product. There are many Canadian standards that are much higher and stricter which I would speak of if I had time, but perhaps another member can pick up this point.

• (1740)

I want to deal with the procedure that is followed in Canada for testing food additives, approving them and controlling them, because Canadian standards in this area are very high. Frankly, the member is promoting further research. I do have significant reservations about research which involves animals for testing. I recognize that medical research is very important in that area, but there are a lot of other areas of testing where I think we have to look with more care than we have in the past as to what we wish to subject animal populations to in the name of some form of research.

This is something that two other members of the House and I are currently investigating, the various animal testing laboratories under the aegis of the federal government. I will leave it to another speaker to go into that procedure in detail, but the result of that procedure is that Canada has the best record of safety in food on the market of any country. We have in fact a remarkable state here that whenever there is some problem with food poisoning, whether it be with the kinds of difficulties that the hon. member was mentioning, it is a cause for great consternation and discussion because it is the exception to the rule.

I think the issue is important but we must be very careful not to raise unfounded fears in this area but to deal with the facts and keep the system that we do have on the track, especially as it can be modified as the result of the work of this review team to whose activities I have drawn attention.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this private member's motion by the hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing which reads:

That in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of undertaking research on the cumulative or combined effects of food additives and pest-control products in the Canadian food supply.

I heard the member opposite say Canada has the best record in terms of testing and control for safety. I would submit that a part of progress is always to build on our strengths and to continue on. Research does not mean that we are putting into question the current state of the situation. It means we would like always to work for the health and safety of all Canadians.

People are becoming less and less confident about the adequacy of government regulations limiting drugs and chemicals in foods. The government does not ban fruits and vegetables when it finds low pesticide residues or forbid the dosing of animal meats with hormones and antibiotics. Warnings about tainted food may be issued only when a consumer falls ill, when a citizen becomes a patient. That is too late. That is not prevention.

Several events in the past year indicate that there is good reason for the public to be increasingly concerned about what is in the food they eat. I would therefore like to laud the member who introduced this private member's motion.

In October our own Canadian Auditor General, Mr. Kenneth Dye, questioned the adequacy of government food testing and pesticide-regulating programs in his annual report. So obviously there is room, in fact a great deal of room for improvement.

A study released in February by the Natural Resources Defence Council, the NRDC, in Washington, D.C., estimated that up to 6,200 pre-schoolers in that part of the country may eventually develop cancer because of repeated exposure to pesticide residues on fruits and vegetables. That figure certainly is alarming and is not acceptable to any citizenry, certainly not to Canadian society. The major cause for concern is the pesticide daminozide, known by its trade name Alar.