

Oral Questions

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister is a few weeks late with his press release, because I just quoted a statement made a few minutes ago by John Killoran, president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, in which he said—I will quote from the English text—referring to a volume of 3.5 per cent:

[English]

It is unrealistic for the federal government to expect the Canadian dairy industry to accept guaranteed access to its markets beyond this level.

He went on to say:

The third aspect of the Canadian offer is the reduction in direct government support for agricultural producers of 50 per cent over the next ten years. "This proposal has never been endorsed by his organization and appears unjustifiable in the context of the GATT" said Mr. Killoran.

[Translation]

I therefore want to ask the minister why the government insists on maintaining a policy that was rejected by the Dairy Farmers of Canada. Why?

[English]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is trying hard but he is unable to overcome the general thrust of the statements. For example, Mr. Jim Caldwell of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association said that there is more to life than cows giving milk; there are cows that give meat. He said if other countries would adopt the Canadian position, we would have a pretty good deal.

The Canadian chicken marketing agency said—the hon. chickens opposite should listen to this—"poultry and egg producers would have little or nothing to complain about. It is what we expected." I mean wake up and join the real world.

[Translation]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Agriculture. Yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture claimed that the Dairy Farmers of Canada supported the Conservative Government's position at GATT, as a result of which dairy imports would double and industrial milk subsidies would be cut by 50 per cent. I would now like to read a quote by Don Killoran, president of the

Dairy Farmers of Canada, who issued a press release about 20 minutes ago:

It is unrealistic for the federal government to expect the Canadian dairy industry to accept guaranteed access to its markets beyond this level.

I would like to ask the minister why he makes this erroneous claim that the Dairy Farmers of Canada approve of his government's policy. He knows it isn't true.

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to know that in the past three years, the Canadian position—When his government was in power, it did not bother to meet Canadian leaders in the agricultural sector even once in 16 years, but we, and first of all the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, meet them whenever necessary. We have set up committees to consult people across Canada. Last week, we consulted the Dairy Farmers of Canada. We are aware of the problems. I would like to read to you a document received from the Dairy Farmers of Canada in connection with the GATT talks.

As far as Canada's dairy industry is concerned, however, maintaining Article XI in its present form no longer provides protection against imports of processed dairy products, a protection that is crucial in order to preserve Canada's supply management program. It is therefore essential for Canada's dairy industry that the wording of Article XI be amended to reflect the Canadian proposal. That is what we have done, Mr. Speaker, and we did it because we believe in supply management.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that Mr. Killoran has just told us 20 minutes ago, not last month, and I quote: "Canada's offer concerning minimum access and reduced support for producers will not benefit Canadian consumers but will severely penalize Canadian dairy producers". That is what Mr. Killoran said just 20 minutes ago.

Here is my question to the minister: Will he finally stand up and defend the agricultural producers, yes or no? If he cannot do that, let somebody else take over!

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr.