

Plant Breeders' Rights

I would like to bring to the Members' attention the fact that we have a very significant grain producing industry all across Canada. Most of the varieties that have been produced for that massive sector in Canada have been produced by public institutions. If we had had plant breeders' rights, there is little question in my mind that the private sector would have been much more involved and the farm families of Canada would have benefited from their involvement. In fact, the only two areas that private sector research and development is heavily involved in in Canada is that of corn and hybrid canola. The fact that the plants are hybrids and do not breed true from the hybrid seed that is produced gives the companies involved some degree of protection and hence the private sector is involved. We need not look any further than that to realize that if there was some sort of modest stimulation for the private sector, they would be much more actively involved in plant breeding here in Canada. There is no doubt the benefits would be forthcoming.

The legislation that is before us today is very similar to that which is presently in force in the United Kingdom. It has been tested and proven there since 1964. Certainly everything that is in our Bill is compatible with the requirements of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

• (1510)

In 1979 Canada signified its intention to join the International Convention. However, we cannot take the final step and join that group until our legislation is in place. We look forward to the day when our legislation is in place and we are members of that international group. Such a step will facilitate the movement of varieties from other countries into this area. There have been examples of outstanding varieties from other parts of the world that have not been released in Canada because the company or the breeder involved was not prepared to lose the variety to mass distribution in Canada.

In Atlantic Canada the climate is somewhat similar to parts of Europe. There is significant opportunity to pick up varieties from other parts of the world, particularly Europe, and test and grow them in Canada once the agreement is signed.

Plant breeders' rights legislation has wide support in Canada. It is popular with many organizations that represent various aspects of the agri-food industry, and it is important to Canada's economic health.

We have received expressions of support for basics of the Bill from such prominent groups as the Agricultural Institute of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Horticultural Council, the Canadian Seed Growers Association, and certainly the Canadian Seed Trade Association.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this Bill. It is an excellent opportunity for individuals in Canada, whether they be in crop breeding or horticultural crops, or any of the rose or flower crops and plants in Canada to have an opportunity to receive some modest reward for their ingenuity in developing new lines for Canadian society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): On a question or comment the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Milliken: Would the Hon. Member care to comment on the provision in the Bill which provides for protection for plant breeders for such an extended period of time? I do not claim to be an expert in this area, but I understand that the useful life of seeds is something like six or seven years. It appears that protection is being given for 18 years in the Bill. Does the Hon. Member have reservations about that, and would he care to voice them at this point?

Mr. Stevenson: There are a number of reasons for the length of time, not the least of which is the fact that it is in agreement with other legislation around the world, and in agreement with the suggestions of various international bodies. The length of time covers much more than seeds. Some tree fruits or vine fruits, and some of those cultivars, are not in any type of production for two or sometimes as long as six years after they are planted. Therefore, they require an extended period of time for the producer of that particular species of plants to come into production and give some value to the grower and to the developer of that particular cultivar.

There may be some flexibility. However, the main reason is the fact that the protection is based on international convention. Certainly, we have examples of varieties in Canada that have been used for much more