

Seeds and Grain Acts

The widespread support for this legislation is understandable. It will serve to strengthen an Act which governs a very important industry in this country, the seed growing industry.

Canada exports about \$50 million worth of seed annually, and approximately \$300 million worth of seed is sold domestically.

Of course, commercial seeds are the basis of our grain production industry, an industry that exports in excess of \$4 billion worth of grains annually. Clearly, it is an industry that is dependent upon the integrity of our seed growing industry.

For the past 80 years, the federal Government has been involved in the regulation and control of seed varieties. The Seeds Act includes a grading system for seed quality, a licensing system for crop varieties, and labelling requirements to help the buyer identify quality seeds.

During the quarter century since the Act was last amended in a significant way, the industry has grown tremendously. There has been a great deal more involvement by the private sector in plant breeding. Bill C-64 responds to these changes.

In essence, this Bill will strengthen the seed licensing system, while providing greater protection against false advertising of seeds.

Perhaps the most important provision is one which will help to ensure that farmers actually receive the seed they assume they are buying based on the product's advertising.

While the current Act regulates the labelling of seed packages, those same regulations do not extend to seed advertising. As a result, it is possible for farmers to buy seed which the advertising tells them is of a certain variety when in fact it is not. Therefore, provisions in Bill C-64 will provide for the disclosure of certain information in advertising and restrict the use of variety names. This is similar to the current requirements for labelling.

I am reminded of the remarks made by the Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Seed Trade Association, Mr. Bill Leask, during committee study of this legislation, in which he stressed the importance of strengthening the Seeds Act to include the regulation of pedigree seed advertising.

He said that the vast majority of seed companies that do operate within the licensing and pedigreeing process deserve to have their credibility protected. They want assurance that producers who buy a company's product by variety name receive the actual controlled product.

In order to enforce the Act adequately, it is necessary to impose tougher penalties for violations. Therefore, the maximum penalty, on summary conviction, will be raised from \$500 to \$2,500, with the courts having the discretion of setting the level in cases of conviction by indictment.

This is a significant change and a necessary one in order to indicate this Government's commitment to the maintenance of a high quality seed industry in Canada.

Under the current Act, the losses to the buyer of defective seed can easily exceed the minimum fine imposed on the person who has sold the seed. The intent of Bill C-64 is to

allow the courts the discretion of setting fines in relation to the damage caused.

In connection with this provision, the Bill also extends the time limit for instituting proceedings by way of summary conviction. This will allow investigators adequate time to prepare their cases and will ensure that no case is dropped merely as a result of inadequate investigation time.

By way of housekeeping measures, Bill C-64 sets out a new system for daily amendments to the registry of seed varieties. It also changes the bonding provision by transferring bonding authority, through the Seeds Act, from the jurisdiction of Customs and Excise to Agriculture Canada.

And finally, this Bill will clarify the role of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association in the Seeds Act.

As I stated earlier, Bill C-64 has widespread support among the provinces and the seed associations. I know that all Members of this House will want to support this Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Althouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Mr. Gustafson) to review for us the manner in which the registry of accepted varieties will be changed through Bill C-64 and what those improvements will be.

Mr. Gustafson: The importance of having this Bill passed is the fact that there are a number of varieties in the marketplace which must be controlled. An example already given is HY 320. HY 320 is a variety that can be easily distinguished.

It is important to protect the integrity of the pedigree and registry seeds. A farmer buying seeds must be assured that he is getting the variety that he desires. The farming community has to have the assurance that there are no problems in relation to the seeds being received. As well, the producers need to be assured that we have the research and development infrastructure such that we can compete effectively in the international marketplace.

Bill C-64 addresses these matters, providing the Government, through legislation, the means with which to deal with any infractions.

Mr. Althouse: The Parliamentary Secretary has made mention of infractions. Is he telling the House that as old varieties are dropped from the list of accepted varieties—and our understanding as a result of the committee study of this Bill is that the process for changing such lists will be expedited—is he telling the House that some varieties will be kept on as a result of overseas demand, notwithstanding the fact that they are no longer grown in Canada?

The departmental officials have told us that old varieties are dropped from the accepted list once they reach the point of non-use in Canada, and we were assured that those rules would not change. However, given the remarks of the Parliamentary Secretary, I am wondering whether there have been some second thoughts in that regard such that those varieties which might be sold overseas will be continued on the list