

Supply

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the hon. member on the debate on agriculture.

Being from the province of Prince Edward Island, which is an agricultural province, I want to make a few comments on a very difficult situation which the potato farmers are experiencing at this time.

They are experiencing this because of what Agriculture Canada diagnosed as the PVY-N virus. It now appears that Agriculture Canada may have misdiagnosed it, maybe it was not the PVY-N virus. However, this has created a lot of problems within the province.

Many of the potato farmers have ploughed under their crops. They did this on the diagnosis of Agriculture Canada and because they were instructed to do so by Agriculture Canada.

• (1250)

Many of the potato producers have lost their markets simply because Agriculture Canada told the United States that we have the PVY-N virus. The reputation of the Prince Edward Island potato industry has been destroyed. It faces a major crisis.

I know my time is limited for these comments but I just wanted to ask the hon. member of the government a question. How would he feel if he was a Prince Edward Island potato farmer and he ploughed under 200 acres of potatoes because he was told by Agriculture Canada that his potatoes had the PVY-N virus and that he had to plough them under? How would he feel if he found out now that the tests are in question?

Mr. Brightwell: That is not a difficult question to answer. If I were that farmer I would feel very, very badly. I would feel outraged, I would feel misused. However, the member has raised the question and it is certainly just a question at the moment. I am told through sources that it may not be, that in fact it is probably not true that there was a mistake in the testing.

I have had long-term experience in agricultural testing in Canada, usually in the animal health field, and I have developed a great deal of faith in our scientists. In fact, I still have that faith. I am sure if there is an error in this particular situation, and I say only if there is, there will be a fair solution for this other branch of horticulture,

one that I really should have mentioned because it is brought up quite frequently in the standing committee discussions. In fact, there is a proposal at the moment that we consider the testing process for this particular virus.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, in my brief comment I would like to thank the hon. member for assisting the committee, as he always does as our chair. He has taken a very courageous position both in bending the rules slightly to have us use the procedure we used in the committee and to permit it to be presented in that form here today. If we could have more members like the hon. member for Perth—Wellington—Waterloo in this House, it would eventually reflect the true need and requirements of Canadians and make this House a much more functional place. I congratulate him and thank him for the actions he has taken, both in the committee and today in this House.

Mr. Brightwell: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments, but I must say that I was surprised to hear that I had bent the rules in committee. The member for Mackenzie is much more experienced than I and apparently he let me bend those rules without telling me at that particular time. However, he is telling me now. In fact, I have great faith in every member in this House. They are genuinely concerned about the people of Canada and particularly with the farmers of Canada. We are in a position now where all of us have experienced situations where we had to go along partisan lines and indeed it created some difficulty for us. So, I thank the member for his comments.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg—St. James): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to put a question to the previous speaker concerning the possibility of restructuring which he had mentioned. I think he is right, and I do not think there is anybody in this House, perhaps anywhere in this country, who knows exactly what the restructuring will be like, what form it will take.

It may depend, for example when it comes to grains and oilseeds, on the success or lack of same at the current GATT negotiations. One of my concerns is that even if restructuring does come, who is going to be left? Who is going to be around when it takes place? Farmers are just going through an absolutely dreadful period, an absolutely dreadful time. It seems to me that with or