

Government Orders

With respect to overlap, we see, once again, that the government did not take it into account in drafting a bill. The minister of agriculture did not say clearly that his bill would save Quebecers from paying twice for the same services. This happens all too often, unfortunately.

As I already pointed out in a previous debate on agriculture in this House, industry and government in Quebec have worked together for a very long time to implement market-winning strategies. Meanwhile, the federal government sets up programs that conflict or overlap with provincial programs, thus wasting public funds.

• (1735)

This also increases the debt, which surely displeases the Minister of Finance. When the government imposes its policies, does it realize that these do not always, and I would even say not often, fit in with the priorities and development approaches of those who work in the sector concerned?

Let me remind you of some of the objectives which came out of the summit conference on rural Quebec in 1991: respect and promotion of regional and local values; co-operation among regional and local partners; diversification of the regional economic base; protection and regeneration of resources; a top-down shift of political power. From this conference arose the co-operative councils, which have proven their effectiveness. The federal government does not take these objectives into account at all in developing its programs.

The government should stop trying to direct farming, but should consider farmers as business people when it supports regional entrepreneurship. It must distinguish agricultural development policies from regional development policies and encourage farmers themselves to realize the importance of environmental issues as a way to promote agriculture. Those are provisions we could have found in this bill.

It is all very well to agree with the spirit of this bill, but nothing prevents us from seeing that there is still a big potential for overlap. Some activities that overlap? Here are some: The Canadian and Quebec governments both support farmers. They both promote the development of markets, research initiatives, as well as inspections of agricultural products.

The fact that the Department of Agriculture will become the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food confirms the greater responsibility of that department. It will no longer simply help producers, because the future of the agricultural sector is dependent on the processing, marketing and distribution of products. The minister made it clear in this House last month. Needless to say that the new department will have to help our producers become more competitive and self-sufficient in relation to foreign producers, and will also have to ensure the future of our agricultural sector.

The bill provides that the minister will assume his responsibility in the field of research, which is essential. Indeed, with the opening of world markets, the department should play an active role in that regard.

I will conclude by asking the minister to look at the issue of overlapping as well as the distribution problems experienced by processors, which I referred to earlier. Then, the new name of his department could be a meaningful change.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of farmers in my riding, and as you know, farming is a major industry in Eastern Quebec, in the province as a whole and, of course in Canada.

I was again very interested to hear the hon. member's comments, but I was surprised at this tendency to ignore what the Government of Canada does for a sector that is so important to Quebecers and especially to the people in the Gaspé.

I had the privilege of working with the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec in my riding, where we handed over a cheque of \$84,000 to develop a small-fruit industry, as part of a program to provide new incentives for local farmers to grow new products for local, provincial and even international markets.

I would also like to point out that the same people have already contacted me, and I am referring to representatives of the UPA and farm producers, especially in the dairy sector, to set up a program for regional processing of milk and cheese.

• (1740)

These people came to see the Government of Canada. They came to see their federal member. However, they have yet to receive an answer, and people may have the impression that their member is the Minister responsible for Agriculture in the riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and has not bothered to respond.

I took this project very seriously. I transmitted it to the Federal Office of Regional Development, because we want to show local people that the federal government is prepared to work with them, in partnership with farmers, the Government of Quebec and all the agencies concerned.

An hon. member: Question.

Mr. Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Lib.): So I am very surprised, and I realize we are on questions and comments, but just the same, if we are talking about agriculture and research, including research on cattle, I repeat, the federal government has made a commitment to develop new technologies, but unfortunately, once again we hear the Bloc Québécois setting themselves up as the defenders of the public service. I do not claim to defend the public service. I defend and promote the