

Supply

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Of course, as hon. members know, I already ruled this subamendment out of order, but in the final analysis, the House is the master of its proceedings. If there is unanimous consent to agree to discuss this subamendment, despite the rules governing this House, the Chair will willingly comply, provided there is unanimous consent.

So I ask the question.

[*English*]

Is there unanimous consent to have the amendment to the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): So the debate will continue on the main motion, the amendment and the subamendment. The hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre has seven minutes.

Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre): Mr. Speaker, I consider myself privileged to have the opportunity to support the subamendment presented by my colleague from Algoma, who is very knowledgeable about agriculture. For many years, he has been a great defender of farmers across Canada.

Today, as my colleague from Algoma said, we might be having one of the most important debates of the year, given the consequences of the GATT negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister of Agriculture explain the process of the GATT agreements and I would especially like to say not only to members here in the House but to many people listening that we must not forget that there is a great deal of history behind our system of supply management. Like many here, I remember a time—and I am speaking especially about the farmers I knew on dairy farms in Quebec—before the system of supply management when it was very difficult for our farmers to pull through.

We know that and I am convinced that many here certainly have relatives or close acquaintances who live on the land or are descended from people who did. They must be aware of the sacrifices our farmers have made in the past, seven days a week and 52 weeks a year. They made tremendous sacrifices to keep the family farm, and it was difficult to interest the younger generation in farming, not only because of the hard work involved but

also because the rewards were often few and far between.

About 20 years ago, after much urging and lengthy negotiations, common sense finally prevailed. People realized it was time we had a system that would see to our farmers' basic needs by guaranteeing a minimum base price for their products, to ensure they run an efficient operation, and I must say most of them do. In Canada during the past 20 years, we have built a supply management system that is sound and people-oriented, a system that works within the GATT rules. This country has put a lot of money and effort into ensuring that our farmers receive a minimum price for their products, while at the same time providing a system that is fair to all 10 provinces. That was a major achievement.

Many countries see us as a model in this respect. The system was unique in that it did not cause a surplus on the international market. There was no so-called dumping by this country. It was a system that did not upset the applecart and guaranteed domestic supplies, which is extremely important. For years, security has been synonymous with defence and arms, but I think we can say, Mr. Speaker, considering the events of recent years, that agricultural self-sufficiency is also important, and I would even say it is more so than national defence.

We have seen a system develop that has served us well, both the country as a whole and the farm community. And now, after 20 years, for reasons we do not readily understand, this whole system is being challenged. Why? We are not too sure. So we send representatives to defend the system and to explain the benefits of our supply management system.

I find it hard to understand why the government has been unable to convince our partners at the GATT talks that our system is a viable one. I wonder about a lot of things, Mr. Speaker. I see the Minister of State for Agriculture here in the House, and I would like to ask him this: Do our two representatives who are negotiating for Canada have what it takes to defend this system? When I read documents from Geneva, I see that churches throughout the world, including the organization of Protestant and Catholic churches, have sent representatives to protest against the Dunkel report. Did we see this in the Canadian media? Did anyone mention this? There is a lot of opposition to the Dunkel formula, but nevertheless there are some countries, including the United States, that want to force on us a situation that world church leaders call a recipe for world-wide food shortages.