

Pesticides

● (1730)

We have suggested, and I suggest it now, that if the Government is truly serious about the threat of toxic chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides, it should transfer responsibility for the testing of these substances and the registration of them to Environment Canada and beef up Environment Canada accordingly.

What is important to keep in mind, I think, is that very often we concentrate on the costs of what not using a particular substance would involve either to agriculture or to whatever is the involved industry. What we need to do is to change our way of thinking, do our bookkeeping differently, keep a different set of books, and ask the question, what does it cost to use these substances? This is a much more difficult thing to do.

It is very easy to calculate what the loss would be in terms of yield agriculturally if we do not use these substances. It is much more difficult to calculate what the cost will be in terms of increased cases of cancer, allergies and other health effects with the use of these chemicals. It is much more difficult but it is every bit as important. We need to arrive at the point where that is the kind of calculation we make when we decide whether or not to use a particular substance for a particular purpose. I hope the debate today will be helpful in bringing the handful of Hon. Members who are here for the debate, those who may be watching on television and those who may read *Hansard*, to the point where they will encourage the Government to think in that way when it is thinking about the question of herbicide and pesticide use in Canada.

Mr. Lee Clark (Brandon—Souris): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words with reference to the motion before the House today as someone who has a particular interest in agriculture and as someone who represents a western Canadian constituency. I would like to begin by complimenting the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) for addressing what is obviously a very important issue, one which is recognized throughout the country. That has been true for a long time and, quite frankly, some of the mechanisms in place today, I readily concede, were commenced by the previous Government, and we are pleased to be a part of that process.

The pesticides program in Canada has been reviewed on a number of occasions. The whole question of seeking input of information is a continuing process as it properly should be.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers prepared a position on registration and use of pesticides in 1982 which referred to the subject before the House today. In addition, the previous Government appointed the Salter Commission. Its report was tabled in 1984 and its recommendations, according to my understanding, have been implemented by the present Government. Therefore, I think there has been a considerable amount of continuity on this particular issue, as indeed there should be, because it is one of the issues for which I do not think there is any particular partisan position. If I may say so,

I think sometimes we in this House do ourselves a disservice by allowing the division which exists in the House to receive a great deal more publicity than those issues on which there is general agreement. I think this is an area where there has been general agreement and perhaps that is worth noting. The ministerial task force which commenced in late 1984 looked at the question of program review as well. However, I do not believe that in itself has been as significant as the studies to which I have already referred.

The thrust of the reviews to date and the concerns of Governments, both past and present, is in terms of providing more information to the public with respect to pesticide programs and the need for pesticide control, and in terms of seeking and providing for public input. In that regard, there has been a considerable amount of progress, and the question before the House today is not so much whether the issue itself is worthy of our attention because, of course, it is, but of how best to proceed and whether or not we need to depart from that which is currently being done.

Beginning in October of 1984, there have been several attempts to provide the opportunity for more public involvement. That has included, for example, the creation of a Pest Management Advisory Board which as part of its responsibilities makes recommendations on broad policy questions and on issues of special concern. The PMAB consults with members of the public and with groups concerned about the assessment and registration of pesticides. As all of us know, the question in some parts of Canada today with respect to the chemical commonly known as Lasso lies very much within the jurisdiction of this particular board.

In addition, an information secretariat has been established within the pesticides directorate. It has as its responsibility and function improvement in communications in general. There is evidence that a considerable amount of progress has been achieved in that direction. For example, as I am sure many Hon. Members know, there is a toll free telephone number or pesticides "hot line" where public inquiries can be dealt with in an expedient manner. According to my information, in the first year in which this hot line was in operation, the year 1986, approximately 500 calls per month were received on average from the public at large, Government officials, the media, the scientific community and many other interested parties. So that would seem to indicate, first, that there is a great deal of concern, as I think is evident to most Hon. Members of the House, and second, there is a method by which the concerned can be registered and by which information can be provided to those who seek it.

It seems to me that the media played a fairly important role up to this point. There has been a great deal of attention directed by the public. There is a great deal of awareness. I think there is every reason to believe that this type of input is both being sought and will continue to be provided.

I suppose the question now before the House is, therefore, not whether the issue is an important one, because all of us would recognize that it is. Certainly, it is an issue to which the