

*Government Orders*

A concern related to by the previous speaker was the concern that this may narrow the control of plant genetic material to multinational organizations or firms. I would like to make the House aware that the plant gene resources centre under Agriculture Canada has some 90,000 assessments which are genetic pieces of material, plants, varieties, et cetera, that are totally available to anyone in the world at no cost so they can use them if and when they wish in order to develop a new plant variety. There is no possibility of this being withheld from anyone who wishes to use the genetic material for further plant breeding. This is only one in the chain of these types of facilities that are available throughout the world.

While there are some groups and individuals who oppose this bill, there is a long list of supporters. They include the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Horticultural Council, the Canadian Ornamental Plant Foundation, the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council which represents some 20 commodity groups in the province of Ontario, Potatoes Canada, the pulse growers' association, SeCan, the United Grain Growers and the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association. Some of these organizations have some qualified concerns and most were looked after in committee. The university institutions are in favour of this as well.

When we look at global trade today there is one important way in which we can take part in that trade to the best of our ability, and that is to be competitive. I feel that the passing of this bill will put our primary producers and the total agri-food industry in a much better position to be more competitive throughout the world.

• (1140)

Farmers are concerned that it may increase the cost of seed to individual producers, because of the royalties they might have to pay. I can tell you from experience that, if a certain seed company comes out with a new seed, a hybrid or a variety of horticultural trees or plants, that the bottom right-hand corner of my balance sheet as a producer may not be everything, although in reality, it goes a long way.

If this new variety will allow me to produce more food at a cheaper price per unit so that the consumers, not

only in Canada but throughout the world can have a safe, healthy food product at a lower cost I, and other producers, are prepared to pay a little bit more for that root stock, seed or plant in order to propagate further plants of that variety.

A few years ago, I would have had more concern about the passing of this bill. Today, with the concern being voiced in the agricultural community and in our society in general about the environment, food safety and all these things, I feel that this bill is probably needed more than ever because we must realize how and why plant breeding is done. It is done not only to produce increased yields, but in order to produce safer products, and a more financially sustainable industry as far as the environment is concerned.

Now the market is being driven, and producers are looking for varieties of crops, trees and plants that do not require the use of pesticides as they did in the past. Producers are the first group of people who want to get away from that type of thing. We must have the legislation in place that will encourage plant breeders to develop those types of varieties and species. They need that encouragement. It is not a process that goes through without the expenditure of large amounts of money, and there must be a way for producers to recover at least part of the expenditure. I am not as worried about it as I was in the past. I think it is necessary in order to encourage this type of activity at the present time.

In closing, I believe very firmly that in Canada we want to help other countries of the world so that they can become more self-sufficient in food. We must encourage them to produce for their own people a safe, sufficient quality of food. We cannot do that unless our own agri-food industry is sound environmentally and economically. I feel that this bill definitely will help our agri-food industry to go in that direction, and that, even though there may be a few concerns about something that hypothetically may happen as a result of Bill C-15, the advantages of this bill far outweigh any possible disadvantage that there may be.

I encourage the House, as the previous speaker did, to pass this bill as soon as possible. After 15 years in the House of Commons at one stage or another, at one time or another, I think it is time for us to complete the work that we have to do on this bill.