

Private Member's Business

significance has been in the past and what its role should be in the years to come.

Obviously now is an important time to review the role of the WGTA just as it is a very important time to review the role of agricultural policies in general. That is why the Western Grain Transportation Act is considered to be a very key transportation issue in the current review of federal agricultural policy.

A discussion paper has been unveiled called "Growing Together". It will be discussed at some length when farm leaders come to Ottawa in early December. It will also be discussed at farm meetings throughout all of Canada.

This policy review is concerned with getting Canada's agri-food industry up to date and able to cope with the next decade.

There are many pressures facing the agricultural sector today, both domestic and international, which point to the need for this comprehensive policy review.

In the past few years, we have learned—sometimes the hard way—that approaches used in the past are no longer appropriate now and they do not always permit us to address future challenges in a way in which we would wish.

In some cases, these policies are preventing the agricultural sector from exploiting opportunities. In others, the uncertainty and unpredictability of ad hoc programs is interfering with its management decisions. I think it is exceedingly important that we rid ourselves to the nth degree possible of our dependency of ad hoc agricultural programs—

Mr. Benjamin: This isn't ad hoc.

Mr. Clark (Brandon—Souris): No, not agriculture, but ad hoc agricultural programs have not always worked in the best interests of the agricultural communities and that is why this review is important.

Recent events have shown more clearly the need to take stock and adapt to the environment the agri-food sector will face in the future.

There are a number of compelling reasons for government and industry to define a new vision for agriculture. The sector needs to adapt to a rapidly changing domestic market for agri-food products. We must also be ready to respond to an increasingly competitive world trading environment. We must also review and revitalize our

financial farm support programs. We must do what is necessary to keep pace with rapid technological change. The challenge of increasing environmental awareness and pressure must be met. Our record for safe nutritious food must be maintained.

In the area of transportation, this government knows transportation policies must be sensitive to both regional diversity and national interests. A program that operates in one region may have implications across the country. These implications must be considered in any proposals for change. For example, four western provinces at the moment either have or have had livestock feed assistance programs to offset the effects of other programs. Sometimes this patchwork of programs leads to conflicting results and makes it exceedingly difficult to have a national approach to agriculture.

Since the WGTA took effect, Canada as a major exporter of grains and oilseeds has experienced the negative impact of huge, direct subsidies by our major competitors, namely, the American and the European communities. Programs which support the Canadian industry must be viewed in the context of these high subsidy levels maintained by our competition.

Transportation policies, like all government policies, should be consistent with international trade rules to minimize the risk of trade action by other countries. Canada wants to reduce over-all levels of trade distorting subsidies, but we do not plan to do it alone. We will be looking at the actions of our trading partners to ensure that they are dealing with their subsidies as well. What we need to do is to examine our grain transportation policies including the subsidies to make sure that they are the most effective form of assistance possible to promote and develop our industry into the future.

Many agricultural policies and programs, including the Western Grain Transportation Act, have been in place for a number of years and in some cases have been built upon a legacy of a number of decades. A review which is now about to take place is designed to ensure that transportation policies like other agricultural policies are developed and planned so that they are in harmony with each other to ensure that government dollars are used in the most effective manner possible, to ensure that there is co-operation between provincial and federal governments, as there must be, and to ensure that these policies work together in co-operation with the farm