

*Canagrex Act*

grex will do for it. As a matter of fact, when you talk to individual farmers or food producers generally, they ask "What will Canagrex do for me?" I think the assumption we are making is that it will do a great deal for the individual food producer. The challenge the government will have will be to indicate clearly how Canagrex will benefit the individual food producers of Canada. What is in it for them? What is in it for the average farmer? The advantage must be made very clear if we are to get their support and encouragement with this particular project.

The Crown corporation of Canagrex must be made accountable. Too often we see Crown corporations designed to serve the people of Canada yet become parasitic monsters within themselves. In my own province, I think the best example is a Crown corporation called B.C. Hydro. It has lost touch with reality. It has lost touch with the people of British Columbia. It has become a corporate monster. While we can also identify Crown corporations that are indeed sensitive to serving Canadians, we must ensure that Canagrex, because of its requirement to serve hundreds of thousands of Canadians and because essentially it will be indirectly linked with millions of Canadians, be accountable. Therefore, I suggest, along with others who have spoken before me, that some consideration be given to making Canagrex accountable to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, or perhaps to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, but certainly in some way better than the existing procedure which at best I think is rather weak. During discussions in various committees, particularly during time spent on estimates, when the head of a particular Crown corporation appears for an hour or two, that is hardly the accountability that Canagrex will require.

I like the concept and the idea of Canagrex. I think it is a good example of an investment which the government can make in the future of Canada. If not, what some would like to term government spending therefore must be curtailed and must not be supported. We in this particular corner of the House feel that this is an example of good government investment. With proper investment, the returns will flow back to the people of Canada, both the food producers and Canadians generally. What is lacking, however, is detail at this point. While we enthusiastically support the corporation on the one hand, we have a number of concerns on the other that must be dealt with in committee.

I have a word of caution, Mr. Speaker. As Canagrex looks for new opportunities, perhaps in the Pacific Rim areas the eastern bloc countries of Europe or the Arab nations, we must be particularly sensitive to our operations in the developing countries. With 23 per cent of our exports going into Third World countries, we must be particularly sensitive because we have made some disastrous errors in the past. I recall two incidents. The first happened when we sent powdered milk into New Guinea. We were dropping powdered milk from aircraft into the jungles of New Guinea only to have the people there think it was some new kind of whitewash to be used for painting their homes, fences and courtyards. The second was when we attempted to introduce skim milk and milk powder

into some of the Third World countries whose populations were not milk drinkers. After being weaned, in childhood, the people never drank milk. Their stomach enzymes, therefore, were unable to digest that type of food.

• (1600)

It is imperative, Mr. Speaker, that our policies complement the food-producing activities of the Third World, that they be developed in co-operation and harmony with their needs and abilities. While we sometimes look at Canadian agriculture as being extremely efficient, indeed in one respect it is, I suppose, where we are able to produce food better and better each year, but we must recognize that the production methods in developing countries are much more energy efficient than our own. Their return in calories of food versus calories of energy is much better than ours. As energy prices here increase, the cost of foodstuffs will increase and our ability to market them will become more problematical. Therefore, I think our enthusiasm for introducing our methods into the Third World must be developed with that point in mind.

Canada certainly has a role to play, Mr. Speaker, in feeding the people of the world, particularly those experiencing shortfalls. We also must be concerned with the fact that the family farm is being threatened. Many, many times in our task force hearings we heard family farm operators saying it was getting more difficult for them all the time, more difficult for their sons and daughters to take over the operation.

When you looked at it, the average age of farmers on the prairies was going up and up, and the corporate farm was becoming more and more of a reality. When you look at the size of farming operations in Canada over the last 30 years you will notice the size of farms has increased and the number of farms has been halved. Again, we are looking at a new kind of farming and food production.

I would caution the Minister of Agriculture that we have now heard from the agriculture marketing officials from eight provinces who say that they oppose Canagrex, they have some concerns. I look forward to hearing these various representatives in committee voice their concerns.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that one third of our food processing is done by foreigners. The fact that one third of that very strategic industry is controlled by foreigners is something that we as Canadians ought to be sensitive to. The cost of food will inevitably skyrocket and the serious loss of agricultural land is something we must not overlook.

I read with interest the point made by a previous speaker that 36 acres of good agricultural land is disappearing every day in Ontario. I am not certain of the accuracy of that figure, but it certainly indicates a trend that all of us are very concerned about.

The minister wants speedy passage of this legislation. While I agree that we ought to move with as much speed as possible, we must also take our time because this is too important to rush through the House. It certainly needs fine tuning. There are many questions to be raised and answered before we