

*Private Members' Business*

consider giving that right to farmers to form national agencies for all products, but specifically here today for potatoes.

**Mr. Lyle Vanclief (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to make some comments on Bill C-266 before the House this morning, presented by the member for Mackenzie.

The comments I will make are as a result of a discussion with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food on the matter of this bill and also as a former potato grower myself for a few years.

Bill C-266 is a well intentioned proposal to promote the orderly marketing of potatoes in Canada. I do not believe this bill is needed or wanted by the industry. The potato industry is one that has made great strides over the last few years. It is developing workable processes to resolve major issues at a national level and to take control of its own future.

Last fall I had the opportunity to speak to the potato growers of Alberta at their annual meeting. I can assure this House that at the meeting and in a small discussion with the executive of the potato growers of Alberta there was no one in the general meeting or the executive of that very vibrant organization who even mentioned supply management as a goal of their industry.

This is not to say that the idea had never come before the industry previously. Twice in the past number of years the potato industry has examined it and the possibility of federal legislation during the 1980s and earlier in the 1970s. On both occasions it was unable to come to a workable consensus within the industry.

This bill would create a Canadian potato marketing commission that would act, quoting from the bill, as the sole agent for all imported potatoes and all potatoes produced in Canada. This commission would also have extensive powers including the buying, storing and selling potatoes.

When the potato industry was seeking national agencies in the past its major objectives were to stabilize prices and to remove surplus so that it could continue to market its product in an organized fashion; in other words, to maintain traditional markets at traditional prices. It did not want an agency that would control its marketing.

Through all the troubles in recent years the industry has strengthened its infrastructure nationally with the formation of the potato committee executive of the Canadian horticultural council in 1992. That committee has begun dealing directly with issues affecting the industry in Canada. The committee has taken on a big responsibility.

I am confident that the industry and the provincial government representatives on the potato committee executive will continue to deal successfully with future problems and they will mature even further in their decision making. This maturing process will lead to a further strengthening of the potato industry at a national level and the development of sound, strategic directions for the industry to follow in its production and marketing endeavours.

Bill C-266 would restrict production and marketing of potatoes to producers holding permit books and would prescribe delivery points and quotas.

Potatoes are a very perishable product. They have to be marketed in a timely and efficient manner to meet good delivery standards. The responsibility for good shipping and handling conditions must remain as much as possible between the producer and the receiver.

In recent years the industry has had to deal with many issues and some of them have not been pleasant to deal with. There have been overproduction, low prices, drought, PVY-n, late blight and various other issues which have seriously affected the marketing of potatoes both within Canada and in our export markets. Despite these difficulties potato production in Canada keeps reaching new peaks with records being set in various parts of the country every year. Across Canada this industry is becoming more and more aggressive, strengthening existing markets and developing new ones with strong returns to producers. Our potato industry today is very healthy. It will continue to be healthy as it competes effectively in open markets around the world.

• (1130)

In addition our government is a promoter of free trade. A quota system for the marketing of potatoes would only erect more barriers to trade in Canada and with our trading partners.

I just want to remind everyone again that the potato industry in Canada is making great strides in increasing production, increasing revenues and expanding its markets worldwide. The industry has developed an infrastructure that meets its needs at the provincial and national levels and is becoming even more aggressive in finding its own solutions to its own concerns.

The industry, I repeat, has shown no visible support for the proposal contained in Bill C-266. Until the industry identifies the need for further national legislation to accomplish its goals I see no reason to proceed any further with Bill C-266.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat intrigued by Bill C-266, the bill before the House today.

This is the first time we have an opportunity to deal with the agricultural sector as it affects potato producers. The purpose of