

Supply

I will conclude by saying that the best solution to Quebec's agricultural development problem is to achieve sovereignty.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I would like to remind the hon. member that, in remarks made earlier today, he used words that almost fit my description of unparliamentary language. I would simply ask him to be careful when referring to what the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell said.

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead for his spirited speech regarding agricultural producers in his riding. I too represent an agricultural riding in Alberta. I am a farmer and I appreciate his concerns for the people who are affected.

However, I do want to remind the hon. member that no one is talking about refusing to buy milk from Quebec, even though Quebec now enjoys 50 per cent of the Canadian fluid milk market with only approximately 25 per cent of the population. If Quebec were to separate, that might influence whether the rest of Canada would buy milk from Quebec. It certainly would not buy milk based on a 351 per cent tariff. It would be looking for a price based on a world price. If it is going to be competing it has to meet the competition. I see that as the biggest threat, not the decision of whether to buy from Quebec.

I would like the hon. member to give us some idea of how the supply-managed producers in his riding can make the transition from the current system, with 351 per cent as the high tariff on butter—they are all in that range—down to free trade in agricultural products, which is going to happen over a period of time. How do we make that transition easier for the producers? It is of concern to all of us. He talked about the hundreds of thousands of dollars that these people have invested. The same situation exists in the grain farming industry in western Canada.

It seems to me that as responsible people we have to not pretend that we will have the supply-managed tariffs in effect forever. We must look at the reality that we are going to have free trade and there will be zero tariffs down the road. We have to help these people make the adjustments necessary to get there. I would welcome his comments in that regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernier: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Reform Party for his question which seems quite relevant. I will answer his question as clearly as possible. In fact, he is asking

me how farmers can adjust to the new international trade context, that is, the reduction in tariffs now set under GATT?

Of course, this is a major concern of farmers in my riding and throughout Quebec and of all dairy and other producers affected by international trade and tariffs.

Allow me to share with him some farmers' reaction with respect to dairy production in particular. Many farmers in my riding said in response to my questions that they would be willing to compete with U.S. farmers—since they are our main competition in the area of dairy production—provided they played by the same rules. In other words, they would if they were in the position to offer products as good as those on the American market.

It must be pointed out that in both Quebec and Canada—since the milk marketing system is the same across the country—not only production but also quality is subject to regulations. This is something we can be proud of. If we want to preserve this quality, we must pay the costs involved. The whole matter must be considered. I will surely have the opportunity to get back to this later.

[English]

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre.

• (1620)

The motion before the House today suggests this government is providing western farmers with an unfair advantage over farmers in eastern Canada. Our job has been and always will be to work with all sectors of the agriculture and agri-food industry to create opportunities and advantages, not to promote one sector at the advantage of another or one region over another, as my hon. colleagues would suggest.

This government's first and foremost priority is to win the national battle against the deficit. Within that reality of fewer government dollars, this government is working extremely hard through the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to help position the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector to increase Canada's share in every available marketplace, at home and abroad. That work has not been at the expense of one part of the country over another. Western and eastern farmers alike have said repeatedly that they do not want to be subsidized; they just want good markets and fair prices.

The changes outlined in this government's budget will help farmers reach that goal while helping reduce the overall cost of government through changes that are designed to improve our efficiency and competitiveness, to remove impediments to development and value-added production and processing, and to take maximum advantage of the world's new trading environment.