

Research and Development

and all of this suggests that somehow or other we have fallen into the unfortunate habit of having government try to make up for what is lacking in the private sector. It is the government which spends most on research in this country, even if it does not spend enough, then business and then the universities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join in this debate and deal with a specific area which was touched on today by the Leader of Opposition (Mr. Clark) but which has not been discussed at length by other speakers. I refer specifically to agriculture and the contracting out provision which is very worrisome to the agricultural community.

The contracting out proposals we were talking about today in terms of allocating more money for research to the private sector is a sound proposition as far as most areas of the economy is concerned. But agriculture is the exception. Agriculture is different. It is not at all practical to make this provision applicable to certain sectors of the agriculture industry. In fact, it would be detrimental. As far as I am concerned, two people are principally to blame for the position in which plant breeders, for example, find themselves. One is the minister responsible for science and technology for not really understanding the implication of this policy for agriculture; the other is the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) for not fighting harder for the farmers who might otherwise have been exempted from these provisions.

There is no doubt that in the future agriculture will be Canada's largest earner on the export market. At present it is about number three on the list of dollar earners helping with our balance of payments. As the incomes of countries around the world rise they will demand food of increased quality and variety. It is interesting to note that the standard of living in Russia is rising, and as this happens the demand for meat increases. The significance is that Russia is importing more cereal grain than ever before. The only major region in the world from which extra supplies of food can be grown in the foreseeable future is North America. Agricultural research is going to be a very important factor in this question of food production.

What has happened to agricultural research over the past few years? Mr. Speaker, it has not fared very well. In fact, it is not really keeping up with inflation. One of the greatest returns on dollars invested results from investment in agricultural research. What will be the result in years to come if we follow this same policy? If the agricultural research dollar investment is not increased, there will be reduced production. The result of reduced production will be higher food prices for the consumer and lower export earnings. On numerous occasions rapeseed producer organizations have lobbied the government for greater research assistance, but their needs have not been adequately met. Funding is inadequate with regard to machinery research, especially in western Canada. Unless research is increased, farmers will not be competitive.

[Mr. Philbrook.]

● (2052)

The recent policy of reducing agricultural research in the public service should be reconsidered. Most organizations are against the government's proposal. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture which represents organizations all across Canada is against the proposal. At a western agricultural conference held recently in Regina, representatives from western Canadian farm organizations were against the proposal. The Agricultural Institute of Canada, speaking for professional agriculturalists across Canada, spoke against the proposal. In its brief the Agricultural Institute of Canada said, and I quote:

The latest proposal from government to transfer research from government laboratories through normal attrition to industry contracts will inevitably lead to chaos and to the destruction of the present ongoing and effective agricultural research programs, with only a remote chance of successfully establishing them on a permanent basis in industry.

The Agricultural Institute of Canada said that Canada needs a greater research effort in the industrial area but, and I quote:

... this must not be accomplished at the expense of established research teams in either government or university where a capability in the primary industry is presently non-existent.

The only solution, the AIC says, is to increase expenditures for research in three areas: government, university and the private sector. The AIC is, of course, correct. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which represents farmers across Canada, has stated:

Farmers are under increasing pressure to compete with producers in more favourable climates, and if Canadian agriculture is going to keep abreast we simply must continue to seek new potentials in breeds, breeding, technology and management.

The greatest concern is the policy of the federal government to reduce research in the public sector. Obviously farmers were not consulted when that policy decision was made. Farmers and farm organizations have repeatedly contacted various departments but to no avail.

The title of the directive which has caused all the concern in the agriculture community is "Policy and guidelines of contracting out of the government's requirements in science and technology". It sets out the principle that, except in certain circumstances, research requirements are to be contracted out to the private sector. Once again that is all right, except when it comes to agriculture. A very important part of agricultural research would be jeopardized, and that part is plant breeding research. Operationally under the proposal, for the Department of Agriculture to decide it necessary to carry on a plant breeding program it would be required to consult with the Department of Supply and Services and with the Minister of for Science and Technology (Mr. Buchanan) to confirm that there are no private facilities capable of performing the function. In some circumstances it might be required to consult with the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Finally, Treasury Board would have to be satisfied before funds for this purpose could be approved.