

Supply

farmers are being asked to diversify and to be ready to respond to changing markets?

Considering that sheep farming is the most ecological kind of farming and that it permits farmers to use land which can be used in no other way, was closing Canada's only research centre on sheep farming, the experimental farm at La Pocatière, a logical decision?

I think that the decision was a major blunder, and each budget probably contains one. The Bloc never said that Canada's budget should not be cut, we are simply making suggestions regarding where to cut. But cutting research and development funding for an industry that is progressing is like robbing Peter to pay Paul, and it will probably backfire on us.

We are inclined to call it another example of Canadian federalism. The least competitive sheep producers will inevitably have to call on stabilization programs more often. That will put more pressure on the Government of Quebec. We find this kind of decision unacceptable and we target it in the first part of our motion when we state that we "denounce the government for reducing the general budget of the Department of Agriculture by 19 per cent".

If the 19 per cent was cut from sectors which did not jeopardize future production, we could have seen what kind of impact the cuts would have had. But how can a government claim to place a high priority on job creation yet cut over 400 research and development jobs in Canada's farming sector—30 of which were located at La Pocatière, in the Kamouraska region—and systematically cut high paying jobs which stimulate economic development?

After cutting 30 jobs in agricultural research, biology, technology, unskilled labour, how can they justify announcing that 25 jobs were created in another sector the following week? This decision appears to be some kind of a nonsense.

I think I know the basic reasons for the choice. They gave experimental farms specialized mandates, for example, sheep farming at La Pocatière. They invested around \$7 million there over the past few years. They rebuilt a sheep barn that had burned down. Then they suddenly decide to close the facility. Because only one experimental farm had this mandate, the others do not really feel that they are affected. They began to sever the strong ties between this farm and the local economy.

• (1245)

I believe that part of the mandate could have been maintained in this area. Nowadays, there are numerous stakeholders, and I will name a few who are not members of the Bloc Québécois, and may not even be known separatists or sovereignists. I will give you an example. Officials from the La Pocatière agricultural technology institute, where the farm is located, Laval University, the Quebec sheep breeders' association, the two national federations I mentioned earlier, the Quebec agriculture depart-

ment, all these stakeholders are asking the minister to meet with them so that they can explain to him why they think he is making a mistake and why he has to change his mind.

I hope that the agriculture minister will have enough sense to listen to their arguments and to look for solutions allowing research and development in the sheep industry to continue and to expand, so as to provide support for producers and keep one of the oldest farming areas in Canada going, with a flourishing experimental farm in La Pocatière as its bet for a prosperous future.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is clear from the remarks of my colleague for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup that La Pocatière is in his riding.

Let me remind you again that agricultural research and development is vital. It is the key to success. It makes the difference between a country where there is food self-sufficiency and a third world country that continually has to import food to feed its people.

My main reason for my interest in sheep is the DLS breed. Some researchers, particularly researchers from La Pocatière in conjunction with their colleagues from Lennoxville, in the vicinity of my hon. colleague's riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, and my own riding of Frontenac, succeeded in genetically producing a new breed of sheep which will leave its marks on the future of sheep breeding in Quebec and Canada.

What is even more disappointing for the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup is, of course, the fact that, after a fire at the experimental farm, the federal government, typically lacking in vision, spent nearly \$7 million to repair and rebuild buildings used among other things for sheep breeding. Now, in this budget devoid of comprehensive view, it is announcing the closure of this research station which, incidentally, was the oldest in Canada and Quebec.

Mr. Crête: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity provided by the comments the hon. member for Frontenac just made to lay stress on how illogical this decision was. A few years ago, the federation of purebred sheep breeders made a decision on where its artificial breeding centre would be located. They chose the experimental farm with a mandate for ovine breeding in Canada, namely La Pocatière. They decided to locate their insemination unit in La Pocatière, so that there would be a direct link between researchers and the industry, which would promote efficiency.

New breed development was just mentioned. This is precisely the type of work you can expect any experimental farm involved in production to perform to develop more productive breeds, groups of animals or individual animals. All kinds of research can be conducted on sheep to ensure they can compete and will enable us to break into the New Zealand market from which we are currently importing. No one here can tell me today that it makes more financial sense in the long term for Quebecers and