

Canagrex

fully cognizant of the attitude of External Affairs public servants, but I am convinced that seldom within the confines of the Lester B. Pearson Building has he heard anything about wheat or potato producers. And I am convinced that during External Affairs' big cocktail parties, potatoes from Prince Edward Island seldom are a priority. So I think, Mr. Speaker, that anyone who has had any contacts with people from External Affairs know it is not really their mandate to look after the promotion of farm commodities.

● (1640)

People also say: Do not worry, the EDC looks after that. Anyone in business who had to deal with the EDC to get funding for farm products knows very well that the EDC's time-lag and lack of flexibility and understanding do not allow it to have ongoing relations nor allow exporters to make fast decisions, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, what is involved often is perishable goods. And unfortunately, the EDC's procedures are much too slow.

Therefore, what we are doing when dismantling Canagrex is letting Canadian farmers down once more. We are saying: Look, the Government has three or four agencies to look after you. But as you know, Mr. Speaker, three or four agencies to look after them means that in the end, no one looks after them, because they are all passing the buck.

So this is why the then government, Mr. Speaker, established a corporation like Canagrex, which only had eight months to prove itself. I think the assessment made by this Government is near-sighted, because in its eight months of activity, Canagrex already was implied in farm commodities export projects to the tune of more than \$160 million, and those \$160 million would have landed directly into the pockets of Canadian farmers who are in dire need of cash, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot understand how Conservative back-benchers who have farmers in their constituencies can accept that such an important help to Canadian agriculture be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that another basic objective of a Canadian trade policy certainly is export diversification. And I believe that systematic efforts were made in the area of grains. There is also of course the Canadian Dairy Commission which is making efforts under its foreign program. But there are many other commodities, Mr. Speaker, which could certainly be taken into account and would allow us to diversify the Canadian agricultural base and our export base.

Therefore, I suggest whoever is concerned about the future of rural Canada cannot but hope that this important economic sector will not only meet our domestic needs but will also turn to other countries to secure important contracts bringing in the currency so greatly needed by our economy.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely do not understand why the Government plans to abolish Canagrex which was only beginning to shape up, having merely hired a few employees

and undertaken reviews on available products. But automatically, the wind is taken out of its sails, it is not allowed to show its usefulness and the economic impact it could have.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Hon. Member for Brome—Missisquoi (Mrs. Bertrand) is concerned about the future of Canagrex because apple producers in her area surely would have benefitted from Canagrex. We know that dozens upon dozens of producers would be ready to sell abroad but have no contacts and no financing, and I suggest that a corporation such as Canagrex could have played a very important role. Since they would not have had to deal with the various layers of government bureaucracy, the task of government officials which was then strictly directed to farming issues would have been made easier.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that for apple growers, hog producers and farmers involved in the production of many other foodstuffs today is a dark day indeed, because their hopes for marketing opportunities abroad have been shattered.

Mr. Speaker, farmers are often advised to take advantage of traditional programs. It has been my experience over the past nine years that each time farm organizations or individual farmers as such . . . I remember a farmer from my area who wanted to sell live cattle in Mexico; he had checked all federal Government programs, knocked on every door, but not a single Government agency wanted to take a chance or insure the risk for this farmer who had developed quite a lucrative market for cattle in Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, Canagrex, within its terms of reference, would have taken care of that, would have ensured that people who wanted to sell cattle abroad would be able to do so, while at the same time providing them with a certain security, because when someone sends between 200 and 300 cows to Mexico, chances are the customer might disappear, and that is why the guarantee was important.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that when we consider what is happening in this country, we realize that the farming community is slowly disappearing. We have heard some NDP colleagues describe the dramatic situation in their own ridings. I suggest that the Government may brag about the supposed assistance it has given to the farming community, but the truth is that no subsidies or appropriate assistance programs will ever replace foreign markets. Mr. Speaker, farmers do not want a series of support programs from the Government. They are hard working, they are willing to produce, and to produce much more than at the present time, but they simply want the Government of Canada to help them gain access to certain foreign markets. Mr. Speaker, they are not imploring, they are not begging, they are simply asking that the same respect be shown for the farming class as for the manufacturers who go on missions around the world with daily financial assistance from the Export Development Corporation. We want the same treatment for the agricultural industry, which is highly specialized.