

Canada. I was concerned primarily with cereal grains, because that is by far the largest sector that depends on new plants coming forward from time to time to deal with problems such as rust, disease, drought or whatever.

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When we conducted an investigation of some of these so-called wonder plants that were being produced at the Rockefeller Institute in Mexico and other places, we found they had some value, but absolutely no value to the Canadian economic structure. They were not adaptable to our climate and geography. Almost all plants have to be bred, and then the plant breeders have to refine them to fit the geographically-specific areas. Indeed, all wheat varieties are not suitable for the whole of western Canada. There are some varieties that are tolerant and will produce commercially and efficiently in some of the dry areas. Other varieties are needed in Manitoba where some areas are subject to various kinds of spores of rust. The plant breeders have to keep ahead of it.

As I have said, this is not new. Senator Fairbairn said that it has been around since 1923. I do not go back that far, but I have been involved in this kind of thing for the last 22 years. I listened carefully to determine what good this would do for the large commercial producers of cereal grains. Not once did I hear an argument that persuaded me that it would benefit them.

I do not want to get in the way of people who are producing greenhouse plants and ornamental plants. Let them try it. Perhaps they can make an argument that they need patent protection for their activities. However, it puts in jeopardy a program that was designed long before my time and long before the time of anyone in this chamber, and that has been working ever since.

The new varieties of cereal grain that the plant breeders in Agriculture Canada develop are worth hundreds of millions of dollars every year to the producers. In Winnipeg there is a cereal grain production unit. The last time I was there—and I admit that was a few years ago—they had 4,600 different families of wheat and several hundred different families of barley, oats, and other things. They do great things there. There are some natural mutations that show up from time to time from the cross-breeding that goes on. They do certain induced mutations with radiation. They do not find a new variety every month or every year, but every time Canada has had a serious problem detrimental to the grain-growing areas, the plant breeders have come up with a new variety that helped.

We know that the mutations for rust spores take place somewhere in the southern United States and that the wind carries them into Canada. That has been known for many years. Every time a new variety of rust comes in, there has to be a wheat plant that can cope with it or there will be a disaster. Our plant breeders have been able to do that.

One of the witnesses who appeared before us told us that in 1986 there would have been a major disaster in a large part of the rust-prone area of western Canada if the plant breeders

had not been ahead of the game. They had already produced a variety of wheat through their selective cross-breeding, so when this particular spore of rust came into that part of Canada they were ready for it, and therefore it did not do much damage.

We can get out of the way and let this bill go by, but I have some apprehension about it. I will tell you another thing that many people have forgotten. Canola was developed in Canada. It came from rapeseed. There was a problem with rapeseed, whether it was the Polish variety or the Argentine variety. It had some characteristics which made it useless. It had high levels of erucic acid that made the meal that came from the crushing of the seed unsuitable for livestock feed. That is why it was uncompetitive to soybeans. You could crush soybeans, take out the oil and make margarine. Then there was a 38 per cent protein residual meal that was extremely valuable as supplements in livestock feeding. You could not do that with rapeseed because the erucic acid was toxic. The plant breeders in Saskatoon went through a long series of plant breeding, and they were able to eliminate the erucic acid completely. That increased the yield potential.

I was the Minister of Agriculture at the time. When the plant breeders did develop this new variety, they called it canola rather than rapeseed. We rented 2,000 acres in the Imperial Valley in southern California in order to increase the availability of seed extremely rapidly. The reason was that you could grow more than one crop a year in California. In fact, in some places you could grow three crops a year. We wanted to make this seed available to the consumers.

I mention this because I know that no private breeder would have done that. It is worth hundreds of millions of dollars every year. Now the Minister of Agriculture says that they do not intend to cut back on the funds to the plant breeders in Agriculture Canada. You can accept that if you wish, but I do not accept it. They have cut back on everything else. Every once in a while the Minister of Finance gets his claws into the amount of funding for various departments. I have seen this government solemnly make a promise, and the next year the Minister of Finance shoots it down. Everyone on the opposite side knows that as well as I do. I had some of that trouble when I was in government. I had the odd program shot down by the Minister of Finance or the Treasury Board. The minister can make that promise with all the sincerity he likes, but he may not be able to keep it.

Honourable senators, I am prepared to get out of the way and let this bill pass at third reading. Let us see what will happen. A consultative or advisory council will be set up. The ornamental plant breeders in Canada, who desperately want the bill right now, think that it will take at least two years to set up the rules and regulations in order to administer it. That will give us some time to find out whether or not it will work.

I hope that nobody makes an application immediately for cereal grain. Let them try out the measure on some other things where they think they need it badly. There is an old saying, which even the Prime Minister uses occasionally, and that is: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The plant breeding that