

*Food Policy*

Acceptable food today implies a far more sophisticated set of quality standards than were required, 20, 10 or even 5 years ago. To meet those demands, our own food standards have changed. Food inspection, for example, remains a vital topic of concern and it may be necessary to reinforce standards that are required with today's advanced food technology and changing consumer patterns.

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Consumers today are also concerned with rising food costs. They are concerned with getting value for their money. They are concerned about food freshness, availability and quality. They are concerned when they see more of their dollars going into the grocery basket. I would ask hon. members and all Canadians to pay close attention as I outline for this House the basic objectives of a food policy which has been in place and working well for some time past.

The first and prime concern of this policy, a concern which has been and continues to be of great importance to me and my department, is that consumers are assured at all times of high quality food at reasonable prices. The second objective is to assure efficient farmers a decent living. The third aim is to provide aid to countries where people cannot adequately feed themselves; and the fourth is to produce products in which we have a competitive advantage for commercial export. In all instances we must ensure that the many middlemen between the producer and the consumer are operating fairly and effectively in a competitive atmosphere. We have met, are meeting and will continue to meet those objectives. But in the changing international and domestic economic climate our strategy to meet those objectives has to change to meet the challenge of the times.

First of all, it must be clear that any strategy to implement this policy must go beyond agriculture and fisheries programs to include the processing, distribution and retailing sectors; and, very importantly, the strategy must cover consumer concerns. To achieve the goals of our food policy we must continually re-examine, change and update our food strategy. If necessary, new programs must be developed to cover food trade, processing, distributing, retailing, and so on.

For those agricultural products that are traded internationally and continue to be subject to external influences so far as domestic supplies and prices are concerned, international stabilization schemes might not only be discussed, but implemented. As an example, I would cite the Canadian dairy industry which depends upon a strong world market for dairy products if it is to function with less federal economic support.

As to domestic products, to be able to provide quality food at reasonable costs farmers must have assurance that their incomes will not fluctuate from season to season. Some programs already provide the assurances they seek. The Agricultural Stabilization Act, the Western Grain Stabilization Act, the amended Farm Credit Corporation Act already give the farmer some of the economic backing he needs. To deal with income instability, this government is ready to maintain and develop policies which will improve orderly marketing while

[Mr. Whelan.]

protecting domestic markets from short-term inflated world market prices. After review, programs will be introduced to extend the protection already given to efficient producers to guard them from production uncertainties, specifically in the areas of crop and disease insurance and resource restoration.

I am aware that any approach to income stabilization must include trade policy and safeguards. Our trade policy will be assessed so that consumers and producers can benefit from a fast, effective system of legislation whenever specific international market disruptions occur that could temporarily distort our own domestic markets. Different protection may be required for some food commodities that are of considerable economic importance in certain regions. For instance, some products of the horticultural industry have excellent prospects of becoming competitive in the longer term, but will require assistance to help them reach the point where they can stand alone.

There is no doubt that better access to foreign markets where our agricultural products enjoy a competitive advantage will have to be negotiated. At the same time, international multilateral or bilateral commodity agreements should be considered where they are in the interest of the Canadian economy. But no matter how good our efforts to improve existing conditions are, the determination to achieve the aims of the food policy will result in less than total success unless we also review and revise our marketing systems. Market information for producers and consumers alike must be readily available and up to date. The role played by marketing boards in achieving this end is certainly of importance. As well as reviewing the total marketing structure, the processing, distributing and retailing sectors will be reviewed according to certain criteria. I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs will be highlighting some of them.

We are still a young country, and it is my intention that agriculture will continue to develop so that more and more we can play a greater part in feeding the hungry of the world. We have a challenge to meet. The document which I am tabling in this House today is a step toward meeting that challenge. This paper examines in detail the many elements involved in creating a practical food strategy to serve, not only the fisherman and the farmer but all those involved in the food chain up to and including, the Canadian consumer.

This strategy stresses the need for consultation with interested groups. Therefore, this fall or early winter, I, in conjunction with my colleagues from the other departments involved, will be calling a working seminar to consider the implications and direction of the effective strategy described in the document being tabled today. Representatives from non-governmental organizations will be invited to attend so that we can establish a productive and continuing dialogue among all sectors concerned with food.

Through continuing communication I am convinced that the elements of the food policy which have to date served Canadians so well can be further strengthened, not only to the benefit of this country but the world.