

Plant Breeders' Rights

impossible to have any plant breeder go back and pick those up and make use of them in the creation of new and better production tools that can be used in the agricultural community.

Perhaps it is lack of knowledge on my part, but we should double check the Seeds Act. That is a concern of the Canadian Seed Growers Association which also supports the Bill. That association has two major concerns. It feels that there has to be more assurance that contributions by the Government to research, as is presently being done, are not withdrawn over a period of time. It could very easily be seen by a Government as a way of saving money and cutting costs. Then the purpose of the Bill would be somewhat defeated. By doing that, we would slowly hand over the control of the creation of those plants and seed stocks to multinational companies, which we do not necessarily want to do. I believe that we should work very hard to guard against that.

The Canadian Seed Growers want to ensure that the registration of those seeds and new crops is done at least as well as it is under the present method in Canada, which is an excellent method. They have to prove their worth. Many things in Canada today are simply marketed without being up to scratch, and people may very well be misled. Before any organization, public or private, attempts to regain their costs under the opportunities provided by this Bill, we must make sure that they prove their worth.

• (1630)

I look forward to further discussion on this Bill in the committee.

Mr. Ken G. Hughes (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, judging by the debate we have heard so far today, the sex appeal of the question about the future of plant breeders' rights is undeniable. I do not want to understate the importance of Bill C-15. I too look forward to the discussion of this topic in committee.

In principle we are talking about tapping into the private and personal initiative and the benefits therefrom to ensure that all of society gains from it. I believe this legislation concerning plant breeders' rights will deliver a considerable economic benefit to this country. Once passed, it will give plant breeders financial incentives to produce improved varieties.

One result will be more and better varieties to improve the economic state of our agri-food industry. Much of our agricultural industry in recent years has suffered in the face of poor growing conditions, low prices, and unstable markets. As a result, we must do all we can to improve the lot of the agri-food industry as a whole.

In Canada, there is strong support for plant breeders' rights among plant research scientists in universities and the federal Government, as well as in other research institutions. Support also comes from the operators of privately-owned Canadian companies which breed such crops as corn, soybeans, cereals and forages. Support comes from farmer-owned co-operatives who do breeding work, and various farm organizations. We are talking about institutions and people with a direct interest in agriculture as a business, as a way of life, and a place of employment.

Concerns have been expressed in some quarters, some of which we heard today. I am sure we will hear some of those discussions in committee as well. Some may like the essential ideas in the legislation but may want to ensure the retention of the public system by which new agricultural varieties are registered for sale. This ensures the merit of new varieties that come into the marketplace from whatever source.

In this connection, let me note the 1985 amendments to the Federal Seeds Act, strengthening the registration system. Others want assurance that publicly run plant breeding programs will continue.

At Agriculture Canada, the home of commercial plant breeding in the federal Government, breeding programs for all significant crops will continue. Every year new plant varieties flow from the research efforts at Agriculture Canada. This is an important part of the research environment into which we hope to inject plant breeders' rights. Others want royalties collected on Agriculture Canada varieties reinvested in the Department's plant breeding programs.

Although it is not part of the Bill we are debating today, Treasury Board has agreed that 60 per cent of all royalty revenue will be returned to the research budget at Agriculture Canada. It is worth while reminding ourselves that under plant breeders' rights there will be plenty of opportunity for variety developers to recover capital investment in research through the royalty collection system. Varieties can also be protected from duplication by competing firms. This will, I hope, encourage