

Government Orders

The Canadian agri-food sector already enjoys some significant advantages such as internationally famous product competitiveness, high health and safety standards, and environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

If we focus our activities on the markets, if we use our limited financial resources wisely, and if we keep in mind that the various elements of the agricultural and agri-food sector are interrelated, we will be able to preserve and even increase the level of success enjoyed by the whole sector.

By proposing these amendments today, we recognize that, even in a changing world, the Canadian agricultural and agri-food sector can continue to play an important role at the international level.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, B.Q.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-49 which we are debating on third reading this afternoon would amend the Department of Agriculture Act.

Mainly, this bill adds the term "agri-food" to the department's name. Like the minister, his secretary of state said in his speech on second reading of this bill that it is important to change the title of the act.

This emphasizes that Agriculture Canada's field of activity is not limited to helping farmers. Indeed, their economic future is closely tied to processing, distribution, marketing and of course research and development at all levels of these various products. It is essential to deal with the whole cycle of farm products.

As agriculture critic for the Official Opposition, I can tell you that we in the Bloc Québécois will not oppose this bill.

• (1620)

Nevertheless, as my colleague from Jonquière said on second reading of this bill, changing the department's name will in no way solve other thorny problems, including overlap with the provinces. What farmers, like pork producers in Quebec, want is not a change in the name of the Department of Agriculture. They do not want a change of deputy minister. What our pork producers in Quebec want is a government that works for them.

For example, regarding pork exports in particular, what has the minister done to clear up the mystery surrounding the reproductive and respiratory syndrome in pigs? Nothing. What did the federal agriculture minister do to reassure the nine countries importing pork, namely Russia, Argentina, Venezuela, Australia, Uruguay, Panama, Korea, Denmark and South Africa? Nothing. What did he do to reassure Quebec's maple syrup producers? Nothing.

Quebec's maple syrup producers do not care whether the department is called the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. What they want is that department to help them sell their product at a fair, reasonable and, above all, stable price. Last Sunday, I met a producer who told me that he had sold maple syrup, in bulk, for \$1.62 a pound. Some people and friends told him that this price was too low and that he should wait until the end of the fall to sell the syrup produced in the spring.

So, that person waited until last month and instead of getting \$1.62 he only got \$1.47, which is 15 cents less. That price does not even cover production costs. These costs keep increasing year after year, while the selling price of maple syrup is almost constantly getting lower. In fact, one can now buy maple syrup for much less than in 1980. This gives you an idea why Quebec producers do not care about the name of the agriculture department. What they want is results.

What did the federal Department of Agriculture do to stabilize prices? Nothing. What budget did it allocate for research and development in the maple syrup industry? None. The result is accumulated surpluses in Quebec, where 90 per cent of all the maple syrup in the world is produced. I come from the region of Plessisville, the national capital of maple syrup; I know what I am talking about and I can tell you that we produce the best maple syrup in the world.

• (1625)

We have surpluses and if the government would only take the trouble to release funds for research, we could surely find some new attractive outlets. Just the other day, the former Liberal Minister of Agriculture, Eugene Whelan—I can give you his name since he is not here—said: "In the agriculture industry, \$1 invested in research later yields \$7." I told Mr. Whelan: "I am no businessman but I can count. If you can guarantee me a seven-fold return over seven, eight or ten years, I am willing to sell everything I own and to invest the money in your research and development company. I am ready to do it if I am to get a seven-fold return."

What has the Canadian Department of Agriculture done to ensure income security for Quebec farmers in supply-driven sectors such as milk, eggs and chicken? Not much. What has this famous department done to find more new outlets for dairy products, eggs and chicken? Not much. Surely, changing the name of the department will not make it any more efficient. We need to change our ways. We have to be willing to change our ways. The department is not doing anything. And the Bloc Québécois will keep nagging at it until it decides to act, because the farming community is fed up with this stagnation.