

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Colleagues, it is now the turn of the government to speak. I do not see anybody standing on the government side. I take it there is nobody wishing to speak. Is the minister of agriculture intending to speak? It would be his turn to speak now.

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I do intend to speak with respect to both groupings of amendments. However, with the permission of the House I would prefer to wait until all relevant comments have been made so that I could respond to them all together, once I have heard all members of the opposition on the points they wish to raise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Landry (Lotbinière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois wishes to express its concerns about Bill C-50, an Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which provides for deductions from the board's wheat sales in the four Western provinces and from barley sales in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia.

We certainly agree with the principle that this sector should contribute to research and development and with an initiative that could generate close to \$5 million for plant breeding research on wheat and barley. Especially since this initiative was put in place by the producers themselves, who will thus remain competitive with their counterparts in countries where plant breeding research is strongly encouraged. I am thinking in particular of American, European and Australian producers, who played a leading role in reviving government plant breeding programs. That is why a deduction program is vital to Western producers.

However, we are entitled to ask a few questions. While the government really meets this sector's needs by promising to contribute to the research fund, it should not withdraw later because it is a producers' initiative. We must see to it that our interests are truly protected.

• (1600)

That is why the Bloc Québécois proposed amendments to this bill which, as you will see, my colleagues from other parties will readily approve. Again, they are aimed at protecting producers' interests.

The first amendment provides that it should be clearly stated in the act that the board must consult with producers before changing rates, for example. If it seems obvious to you, then the government should have no objection to putting this in writing in the act. This would provide extra protection for producers. We must ensure that the Canadian Wheat Board always consults producers' associations before recommending changes in deduction rates. The democratic right of any association of producers to be consulted should be respected.

The second amendment is necessary to prevent the department's research projects from duplicating or overlapping the industry's. We are told that those concerned in the farming community will discuss the research plans in order to avoid duplication and overlap and ensure that the funded projects are complementary. The bill says nothing about this and that is why this amendment is essential. We in Quebec have seen too much wishful thinking to believe that the government will always act logically. The Minister of Finance has told us often enough that the government's financial resources are limited. A good way to avoid wasting public funds is to make duplicate research impossible.

We all want to reduce the deficit. When an opportunity to avoid waste presents itself, we should seize it! If you refuse to adopt this amendment, the people will judge you and you will be accused of lax handling of the funds provided by the producers. What we are asking for is a simple effort so that the government does not subsidize the same research activity twice. Show some resolve to end waste—that is what the people expect of us in general and the government in particular.

The Reform Party presented two motions with which we agree. Having the minister table a report will show that the producers and the government actually co-operate. However, we consider the fifth amendment unacceptable. Alberta set up its own program and, considering that we keep asking the government to put an end to duplication and overlapping, we would be ill-advised to let that government impose its program on a province which already funds research through contributions from its producers.

It would be useless to compete with the provincial initiative in Alberta. Quebec's example should be eloquent enough to understand the absurdity of such overlapping. In our province, the federal government never stopped trying to control agriculture. It has been told time and again that the Quebec government already supports farmers. Yet, the federal government is involved in market development as well as in research activities, even though the Quebec government is already looking after these aspects. The same is true for activities related to the inspection of agricultural products. Let us reject this amendment so that Alberta can avoid such problems with overlapping.

As for the other amendments, the bill would become a lot more acceptable if they were supported. As we say back home, you cannot be against virtue.

[*English*]

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on these amendments as they have been grouped today.

I am particularly pleased that the minister of agriculture has indicated that he wishes to listen to all the presentations before responding. I certainly respect that position. I am quite appreciative of the fact that the minister is present today and that he is