

Canagrex

opportunities as possible to market quality products which can really compete on the international scene, and that Canada will grow to become one of the world's best exporters of products. The way things are now we feel that the mandate of Canagrex has been assumed by other agencies and departments, that the Canadian farming community is adequately served by the existing structure, and that time has come to lay to rest a corporation which like so many others—and I hope this Government will have an opportunity to take action—which like so many others, as I was saying, probably no longer has its *raison d'être*.

● (1620)

[English]

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Madam Speaker, first let me say how glad I am to see you in your capacity as Acting Speaker in the Chair. We welcome you and wish you the best.

I find this debate very interesting because there is a strange mythology being created by some members of the Government who believe there is no role for the Government, or for the state, in promoting exports. I listened very carefully to the remarks of the previous speaker, my colleague from the government side, who tried to develop a reasoning for abandoning Canagrex. I must say that his reasoning in trying to convince us that this was really a good idea was pretty frail, to say the least. The more you consider it, the more you must conclude, with regret, that this decision is not really in the best interests of our agricultural communities and not the best thing for our economy, particularly in certain regions outside of Quebec and Ontario, whose well-being depends on our capacity to export. We do not ask the private sector to move citizens by VIA Rail. We do it by way of a Crown agency which is publicly owned. We do not ask the private sector to move citizens within our cities. We all rely on our respective transit systems whether they are in Toronto, Montreal or Ottawa.

Mr. Malone: Taxis.

Mr. Caccia: The Hon. Member draws my attention to taxis which do in fact exist to provide movement for a small number of citizens. That is the point I would like to make. For the real promotion of agricultural commodities in a highly competitive market we need to bring to bear the total knowledge of the Government through its listening posts abroad, and a grouping of skilled people into an agency, to achieve the objective of increasing our exports as we compete with other nations.

The Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) made an excellent speech just about a year ago in which he drew to the attention of the House the fact that there are countries which have already organized themselves along these lines, namely, the Federal Republic of Germany, Israel, Mexico and Greece. There are probably other nations as well. France, I believe, has a very sophisticated institution called SOPEXA. The entire European community is operating on the same principle. First there is the realization that we have a very competitive

international market and, second, there is the necessity of developing the instruments which are necessary to compete abroad. Canagrex was a terrific idea.

The Minister of Agriculture, the third preceding the present Minister, if I remember correctly, gave a fantastic speech on the subject at Harbour Castle in December, 1982. Imagine, Madam Speaker, he gave a speech on Canagrex in the heart of Toronto! He did not even go out to the rural ridings. He went to the heart of an urban centre to make his case. It was a very good speech. In a nutshell, the points he made were the following: Canagrex would provide market identification and intelligence, and promotion and information services. No one can object to that. It would provide loans and guarantees, which is not such a bad idea. I am sure that many Progressive Conservative back-benchers would not mind having such a measure available.

● (1630)

Mr. Hopkins: Particularly interest-free.

Mr. Caccia: The Hon. Member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke (Mr. Hopkins) suggests that is so, particularly if they were interest-free.

Canagrex would enter into joint ventures with private companies, marketing boards and co-operatives upon request. Canagrex powers would include the acting as agent of the Crown in negotiating state-to-state contracts, which is a very interesting feature. Canagrex would also include in its powers the providing of grants and contributions to help accelerate product development, and the promotion or provision of infrastructures. That is not a bad thought at all. Finally, he indicated that nowhere is Canagrex given monopoly power over any commodity, either in exporting or importing.

In true Eugene Whelan fashion that was not his last point. He had some furthermores. He said that the majority of the 11-member board of directors would be selected from the private sector. He said that there would be an all-industry policy advisory committee formed to help guide and monitor Canagrex. He also said that the agency would operate from a three-year corporate plan and that each year it would be scrutinized by Parliament to ensure that it was carrying out its mandate. That is not a bad idea either. He also said that after five years Canagrex would be brought before the Standing Committee on Agriculture for a complete review and that there would be a provision for an annual comprehensive review by the Auditor General. He stated that the president would receive direction from the board of directors and that the legislation would clearly state that Canagrex would not get involved in the products handled by the Canadian Wheat Board and by the Canadian Dairy Commission. I thought that here was an outline in the modern state for an export agency that was not too bad at all.

In February of 1985, the Hon. Member for Algoma asked the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise), among other things, whether or not, in view of the success of this corporation in the