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# **Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, May 30, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. James Bezan**

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## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

•(1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

We are continuing on with committee business. We need first to move Mr. Easter's motion back onto the floor.

Mr. Hubbard.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.):** The motion reads as follows, Mr. Chair:

That the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Agri-Food recommend that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food immediately rescind the changes announced to the Canadian farm families options program on April 20, 2007 and restore the provisions of the program as originally announced.

**The Chair:** Okay, it's moved by Mr. Hubbard on the floor.

Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back in this nice cozy little room we have here.

Yesterday, before I was interrupted by the bells, I was making an effort to make a case to my committee colleagues that the money that will be freed up by the minister's decision to change the Canadian farm families options program could be better spent elsewhere. I pointed out the fact that when the program was initially announced, there was much criticism of it and people were saying that it was inappropriate or that it wasn't the best way to go about doing things. The minister has responded to that and made some changes, but most importantly, he said that the dollars that had initially been earmarked for the program would remain there for farmers, and that those dollars would be spent on farm programs.

It was in that context that I started to think about some of the alternatives that we might be able to spend those dollars on if we had access to them. Recently both through regular committee hearings as well as in our coast-to-coast consultations, we heard a lot of good ideas. Therefore, I said that it was my goal to present some of those ideas we heard in those meetings and some other ideas that I've heard here and there in my riding and elsewhere, and from some of my more experienced colleagues around this table, and to put those ideas on the table, and in so doing convince a majority of members of this committee that we ought to actually defeat Mr. Easter's motion, and that those dollars could be better spent somewhere else.

I had started to identify a few examples that I had come up with myself really in an attempt to persuade my colleagues to change their point of view. I said that in a quick brainstorm I had come up with a

dozen ideas. Yesterday, in the brief time that I had, I had the opportunity to cover three of those and I'd like to move on to the balance of that list today. Before I do that, I just want to briefly recap the three that I did cover yesterday.

The first was that I think we should be investigating some sort of a program to help young farmers buy farms. We heard some interesting ideas and we have some interesting ideas. I suggested that possibly we should look to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and some of the programs they had developed over the years to help young families buy homes. Maybe some of that logic or some of those financial structures could be used with farm purchasing.

The second idea that I put forward was to do with genetics. I pointed out that for many livestock farmers in Canada, in addition, possibly, to their primary source of income—for dairy farmers I was thinking it would be their milk cheque, obviously—that exporting genetics—semen, embryos as well as live animals—was a very important secondary income stream for them.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, the member really is off the topic, because as we told him a number of times yesterday, this deals with the provisions of the program as originally announced. The ideas he's talking about are wonderful ideas and we'd love to see the government come forward with moneys in those areas. However, this was a program that low-income farmers had planned on. They had planned on it. Their tax advisors advised them how to utilize it. He is off the topic in talking about farm purchases and so on. That's not what this program was designed for. It was designed to put over \$18,000 into the pockets of farm families who met low-income criteria. Thousands met those low-income criteria. The government retroactively stopped the program, which threw everybody into a lurch.

If he's going to propose plans that he thinks we could support, then tell us how those plans are specifically going to target the low-income families who would have benefited from this particular program, now that they knew what it was going to do. The critique we outlined last year was because the program was after the fact and it was at the end of the tax year. The tax year was long over. They couldn't meet the criteria at that time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Breitreuz, on a point of order.

**Mr. Garry Breitreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Chair, as I'm listening to this member, it's pretty obvious that the points he's making relate directly to what the issue is here, which is helping farmers get established, helping them make their farming operations more viable to the point where we wouldn't even require a farm family options program.

So with all due respect, I really dispute what the member opposite is trying to say. I think this directly relates to what the topic is here. I object strongly to what he's trying to say.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, if you're on the same point.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** A point of order here again.

As I pointed out yesterday, Mr. Easter is inferring that farmers planned on this; basically, you planned to cook the books or whatever. Again, the farmers I know don't do that. To say they planned that, you don't plan hard times in agriculture. It just happens, whether it's weather or whatever. I don't have to tell anybody that, and I shouldn't have to remind Mr. Easter.

To infer that farmers are cooking their books is wrong, and I think

**The Chair:** You know, I'm going to suggest to all members that if you want to get on the speakers list and participate in the debate, indicate that to me. Let's make the points of order actual points of order.

Mr. Devolin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Thanks.

I appreciate the sentiment that it's important that the things I'm bringing forward do relate directly to keeping families on the farm and keeping farming viable in Canada. This is not a random list of ideas. This is a specific list of ideas that deal directly with that issue of how we can make farming more viable in Canada, how we can get more farmers on the land, and how we can keep them there.

I was talking about genetics assistance. I won't go over everything I said yesterday. The bottom line is that there are a lot of farmers in Canada—I'm thinking primarily of dairy producers, but also sheep breeders, those who raise breeding stock, as well as goat producers and others—who were sideswiped by BSE. I think that possibly we should be looking at ways to help that industry get back on its feet, because it.... A cow that is sold overseas as breeding stock is worth a lot more than one going into a packing plant. And so I think that it's a smaller number of very high-value animals.

The third thing I touched on very briefly yesterday was biofuels and some of the opportunities that exist out there with renewable energy. The government has, over the past year and a half, committed significant amounts of money to biofuel. In my part of central Ontario, there's an ethanol plant going in, and I know that farmers, particularly corn producers, in my area are very excited about that.

But I'd like to move on, because I'd like to get through this list.

Recently when we were in Washington discussing the U.S. Farm Bill, we heard a lot of interesting ideas. If people actually take a look at the U.S. Farm Bill, what's interesting is that there are different sections in that bill that deal with different things.

One of them is conservation and conservation measures. I've heard it many times from farmers that they're in favour of protecting the environment as much as anyone. In fact, as stewards of the land, people who are on the land themselves and have their hands in the

earth on a regular basis, they would claim in fact that they are more concerned with clean air, clean water, and clean soil than the average person is.

One of their complaints is that farmers can't bear the full cost of the public good, which is clean water, clean land, and clean air. As an example, here in Ontario the provincial government is barging ahead with the Clean Water Act. It's certainly hard to stand up and say that you're against clean water. It's a lot easier to stand up and say that the cost of ensuring clean groundwater and clean surface water in Ontario should not be the sole responsibility of farmers.

Farmers are required to spend tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of dollars on environmental structures on their land. These are improvements that are made to reduce the impact that it makes on the environment but that have no impact on their bottom line. They don't get any more money selling their product simply because they've spent \$100,000 on some sort of a structure on their property.

The joke is, you pay people not to farm, but I think there are places where farmers own property that maybe is not ideally suited for agriculture. It may be an area, whether it's a ravine or a wetland or some other natural feature that has a significant natural heritage value, and there is indeed a public interest in preserving that. But the point is that the farmer shouldn't have to bear the whole cost of that.

That's something I think we, as parliamentarians, and the minister and the government should look at—how do we ensure that, on the one hand, we protect the environment and do everything reasonable to protect the quality of our water and our soil, and at the same time not create a situation where a small number of people, namely farmers, are asked to carry the vast bulk of that cost?

The end goal, which is protecting the environment, is laudable and I imagine everybody supports it, but there has to be some discussion about who pays for it. And that's an important measure that I think we could look at.

• (1555)

Another component of the U.S. Farm Bill is rural development. That's potentially a very broad topic. In our federal government as well as in, I expect, most provincial governments, there is a department or ministry dedicated to rural development. As my colleagues know, in a small community sometimes it's some sort of infrastructure or some sort of facility, whether it's an abattoir or whether it's a transportation facility. In the last few years the availability of high-speed Internet has become a major issue; farmers who run multi-million-dollar operations need to have access to the world and the information highway.

When I think of rural development, I think of the importance of quickly developing and implementing a strategy—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

We're not talking broad policies.

Let me read you what the minister said about this program:

The Canadian Farm Families Options program will help lower-farm-income families explore options to raise their income in the future. Options is a pilot program with a federal commitment of \$550 million over two years.

He goes on to talk about business and technical assistance.

That's what we're talking about. It's for low-income farm families. That's what we want reinstated. You're off the topic in terms of why you are voting against this particular motion that would restore the \$246 million that this government and this minister have broken their word on—have violated the trust and taken it right out of their pockets.

**The Chair:** I'll say it again: that's a point of debate, not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** I thought I had done a good job of making the connection between the points that I'm making and my general opposition to Mr. Easter's motion, but apparently I haven't, so I'll go back and do it again.

The minister committed a significant amount of money, over \$500 million, to help farm families in Canada. There was a particular program put forward, the Canadian Farm Family Options program. I recall that when that program was introduced, it met with widespread criticism; many people thought it was inappropriate and that it was not the way to address the farm income challenge.

Where we're at now, Mr. Chair, is I believe my recommendations are not only somewhat on the mark; I actually believe they're entirely on the mark. The mark is, what do we do? I believe the minister made the right decision when he changed this program. I believe he made the right decision when he said that money was going to stay on the table to help Canadian farm families.

I think we should be moving on; that's why I will be voting against Mr. Easter's motion. I do not think we should rescind the changes; I think we should accept the changes as announced by the minister, and we should endeavour immediately to identify ways that the money that will be available now can be used to address the very problem that was initially identified by the minister, that being an income crisis on family farms.

I would rather see tax dollars spent in Canada figuring out ways to keep people on the farm, rather than spending tax dollars figuring out ways to help people get off the farm. I think this is an opportunity for us, and that's why I said when I started that my goal was to identify a list of ideas that I have had. I admit that there may be others at this table with other ideas and I look forward to hearing them, but these are some ideas that I want to put forward. My goal, as I've always said, is to present an argument that is so sufficiently compelling to other members of this committee as to cause them to change their position and come around to my position, which is that we ought to oppose this motion and that we ought to be thinking about other things to do with this money. That's where I'm at.

I believe I was on point five, which is on rural development. More specifically, I was talking about the need to expand access to high-speed Internet to farm families across Canada as quickly as possible. We all know that this will not be inexpensive. In my own riding there are places where they're laying fibre optic cable—

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ):** I have a question for my colleague. What he is saying is all well and good, but I would like him to tell me what he plans to do with \$246 million, given what he has just told us. Farmers will not be getting a lot in each category. There is not a great deal available, given the \$246 million that the minister does not want to put back on the table and the plans he has just shared with us. That is my opinion.

You should be very careful about what you say because these proceedings are recorded and your words can come back to haunt you. At some point, these words could be thrown back at you in the House or elsewhere. Someone could claim that Mr. Devolin said this or that. You represent the governing party, so you should choose your words carefully.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Merci. Again, that is a point of debate, not a point of order.

I encourage anyone who wants to speak to the motion to put their names on the list, but right now Mr. Devolin has the floor.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I take the point that with \$246 million available, it would not be possible to fully finance all of the ideas I am putting on the table. I'm not presenting these ideas as some sort of strategy with several components. I'm presenting them more as a laundry list of ideas.

My hope, as I said before, is that one or two or three of these ideas will pique the interest of my colleagues and will cause them to get excited enough about them that they actually choose to change their vote.

While I recognize that there is certainly not enough money... For example, in terms of rural development and infrastructure, absolutely, telecommunications infrastructure is very expensive, and obviously we couldn't do all we need to do for \$246 million. But I think \$246 million would go a long way towards getting some of the other ideas I've raised off the ground.

Moving along, another chapter that's in the USDA 2007 Farm Bill has to do with nutrition. It's interesting that, when you actually look at the Farm Bill, you see that a large amount is for the nutrition food stamps program. I'm not suggesting we introduce the same thing in Canada, but I do think that one way we can make agricultural issues more relevant to all Canadians—not just rural Canadians who are on the farm, but all Canadians—is to put them in a context that's relevant to them.

Just in reading the newspapers and watching TV, you'll see that there's a heightened interest in nutrition in Canada. If we can link what we're doing in agriculture to improve nutrition to this, it is something that actually paves the way for an appetite for more money, for example. If 33 million Canadians thought there were a program that would directly benefit them and their families by improving nutrition and the general quality of the food they eat, I think they would support it. That's another area we could look at to help make the link better from farm issues to food issues.

I'm going to move right along here, Mr. Chair. My seventh idea is this. We've heard a lot of talk about organic farming. There is a customer demand for organic farming.

Last year I was in British Columbia, in Whistler in a grocery. What was interesting is that whereas in most grocery stores you see the mainstream fruit and vegetable section and then over in the corner maybe there's a smaller organic section, in Whistler there was only one section in the supermarket, and it was organic. I had never seen that before. In that community there was a mainstream supermarket that was exclusively selling organic fruits and vegetables.

It was something I hadn't seen before, but as we all know, the west coast of North America is the birthplace of many of our long-term social trends, so maybe this is something that will be coming soon to a town near me. I can tell you, if it does, and if we get to the point where there is a larger number of consumers who want to buy organic produce, I think that's an opportunity for farmers.

In my own riding, for example, I have some organic farmers. I have one organic dairy farmer currently and I know there is a demand for organic milk. I also know that currently there are seven dairy farmers who are in the midst of the transition process to becoming certified organic, and as most of my colleagues would know, typically that's a three-year process.

A farmer has to basically hire a consultant—this has to be a recognized consultant—to come in to write a plan for them, so that over three years or so they get to the point where, if they do all the things that are prescribed, they actually can become certified organic. There are currently seven dairy farms in my riding, which is a significant number, that are in this process right now.

• (1605)

One of the other ideas I'd like to put forward, for which I hope there is broad support and which might generate a little excitement, would be maybe we should be looking at some sort of program that would financially and otherwise assist mainstream farmers in this transition to organic farming. Maybe there's something we can be doing that we recognize in the long run there are opportunities for. It is in the broader public interest to have viable farms and to keep families on the farm, and if in the future there is going to be growth in the consumer demand for organic agricultural products, then maybe we should be assisting farmers to jump over that threshold to get to a place where they want to be but for cashflow reasons are unable to do it on their own.

Mr. Chair, in Ontario an analogy or a comparison I would use is the vineyards down in the Niagara area, where 20 years ago the vast majority of grapes grown in Ontario were—I don't want to call them

low-quality grapes—Concord grapes that were used to make low-value products, and government at that time decided that there were great opportunities in Ontario to actually move into a higher-value product. I only speak of Ontario because that's the example I'm most familiar with. You don't tear your vines out one day and have fresh grapes off new vines the next year. It takes a period of time. But the government spends money on some stuff that doesn't seem to make much sense, and other times you look at a program and think it was a good idea. That was something that has paid off big time in the Niagara Peninsula, not only for the wineries but for tourism and other opportunities it has spawned.

Maybe some sort of transitional program to organic farming is something we could look into. We could investigate and possibly recommend to the government that this would be something that might have a long-term impact of keeping families on the farm, and might even, in the very short term, provide some hope.

I said yesterday that when the Canadian farm family options program was first announced it caused me some discomfort. I had some mixed feelings about it. Rationally I understood why it was being done, but on another level I didn't like it, because it wasn't offering hope. It wasn't offering hope on the farm anyway. With the farmers I have met, both before I was elected and since I have been elected, what never ceases to amaze me is the value proposition that they're prepared to offer consumers, which is that they will invest large amounts of money, they will work from dawn until dusk, and all they want is a basic living out of it. Farmers are resilient, and they are financially resilient, and the fact that like Rocky they are still on their feet 13 rounds into this is a real tribute to Canadian farmers. In our committee, even if we came forward with some ideas that offered some hope to those farmers, and said we are thinking about the future and we have some ideas, the government has money on the table and here are some ideas for things we would like to get going, and if you move forward with these maybe they can benefit from them, maybe that's all some farmers might need to stick it out a little longer and hang in there.

We all agree with the fact that most farmers we talk to want to stay farming. It's the oldest joke. When the farmer wins a million dollars and the lottery people ask what is he going to do, he says he'll just keep farming until it's all gone. Coming up with a program like a transitional program to move into organic may be something that's of value.

**An hon. member:** He's sneezing on you.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** When I ask that you get excited about these proposals, I wasn't thinking that you'd have quite that reaction.

**An hon. member:** I'm allergic to it.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Anyway, that's number seven.

Moving along to number eight, one of the concerns that has been raised in a particular part of my riding in central Ontario is that some farmers are in a tight spot and they're being offered payment to put sludge on their land.

●(1610)

In some cases, it's sewage sludge that comes from sewage treatment plants. I'm told by some people that's a good idea. I don't know enough to argue that. There's also paper sludge being used in Brock Township, which is in my riding, and that causes a great deal of concern to farmers, neighbouring farmers, to members of the community, and to me. This paper sludge results when they recycle paper over and over. After a few times you're left with this stuff that you can't even recycle into the lowest quality of paper. This is some of the stuff. Now, there is organic material in it. I recognize that. But there are concerns that spreading that on the land, in the short term, possibly because you could use the money, may not in the long run be the best for the land. As I said, I'm not a farmer myself and I'm not an expert on soil, but I certainly think that identifying potential revenue streams, and the use of this is proof of the tough spot that some farmers are in, and quite frankly, having some regulations around what can or cannot be added to the soil in terms of long-term implications or in terms of run-off is something we should look at.

In that area, most of the run-off goes into Lake Simcoe. Just recently, in fact, the government announced \$12 million to look at water quality in the Lake Simcoe basin. I'm pretty sure that one of the issues that's going to get looked at is what's being put on the land upstream a little way, particularly paper sludge and where that might lead. Anyway, I don't want to spend too long on that. That was number eight.

Number nine, something that I've heard in my riding and we've heard different places is it seems impossible for local farmers to get their produce into local supermarkets, into local retailers. I don't know what the answer to that is. I know it's true where I come from. I know my wife and I have tried to be good consumers and support our local farmers and support Canadians, but she has a hard time sometimes. We go to the local grocery store at the end of August or in September and we want to buy corn on the cob and it doesn't look like the stuff that's being grown in the fields that we had to drive past to get to the store. We find out after the fact that it's actually been imported from somewhere else, and the local farmers who produce sweet corn can't figure out how to sell it. So that's another area.

I go back to the point that Roger made, which is that \$246 million can't fund all of these ideas or solve all these problems, and I agree with that. But I think that sometimes there are things the government can do that don't necessarily have to cost a lot of money because government has fiscal levers that it can use to influence people's behaviour. We have other regulatory and legislative tools that we can look at, and I can't for the life of me figure out why I can't get local produce in some of our local stores. So I can tell you, if we want to send a signal to a lot of small farmers that we're their friends and we're going to try to do something for them, I think that saying that we're interested in this issue.... I appreciate my colleague Larry, who has raised this issue before, and I know it's an issue in not only his and my riding but across the country. So that's number nine.

Number 10 is related to that—I appreciate that I may be, in this one, wandering a little further from a direct connection than I have up until now, but I still think it's valid—and it is to look at labelling. We've heard this, that you buy a jar of pickles that says “product of Canada”, and then you find out that the cucumbers were grown in China. I'll bet if you went into a supermarket and asked 100

consumers where they thought those cucumbers were from, 99 of them would say that they must be from Canada because it says “product of Canada” on the label.

●(1615)

While I appreciate in the modern economy the importance of value added and what it means and where the value is added, I also suspect that the pickle company probably doesn't want to put “grown in China” on the label. That to me in itself is proof that they know consumers would not want to see that. So they carefully chose their words to say produced in Canada, which is technically true and meets the current legislative and regulatory requirements. But I would say it fails to meet the kind of simple honesty test that I think Canadian consumers expect, not only from food processors and corporate citizens in Canada, but also from government. I think this is a related topic. That's number ten.

Concerning number 11, recently a farmer in my area who is doing a variety of things.... It's a kind of what I'll call a modern mixed farm. This couple do everything from producing maple syrup to doing some logging on their property to running a harvest share program that my wife and I participate in during the summertime, whereby every week we go and get a box full of whatever was harvested that week. It's great, because we always have fresh local food. My kids are actually figuring out that the stuff that shows up on the supper table had to come from somewhere and are getting to see where it's coming from.

This couple wanted to start what you might call agri-tourism or agri-education. The idea was that they use organic farming principles, and they think there's a business opportunity to bring in people from other countries and from other places who would come and stay on their farm and work alongside them for a period of time, almost in an apprenticeship, to learn more about it.

They were well down this road and had launched a website and had developed a program and had marketed a little bit, and at the eleventh hour, right before they were about to start this little program that they had invested in, the insurance company came along and sabotaged it. The insurance company said they would discontinue their insurance if they brought these people onto their property to work there.

●(1620)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think that's the key point. The key point is, as the member just mentioned, that he's going after the insurance company for cancelling the program at the eleventh hour. This is what this motion is all about. At the eleventh hour and fifty-five minutes, the government cancelled a program that farmers had counted on for \$246 million for low-income farm families.

That's what's it's all about. You've just made our point. So I would expect you now to reconsider and support our motion.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** I appreciate that input. Actually, I appreciate all of these interventions, because it lets me know that people are listening. Sometimes I'm afraid that people aren't paying attention to me, that it's like home, people pretend they're listening, but they're not really. When someone picks up on a small point like that, I know that they are hanging on every word, so I'll be particularly careful.

The bottom line is that there are other barriers out there sometimes to some of our creative farmers who are looking for different ways to generate revenue from their land base and to do things. I think that's another area that we could look at—to try to identify some of these other barriers and approaches. The insurance companies aren't going to probably change their policies in response to a single farmer who's trying to create a new business opportunity, but they might to government, which may come along and encourage them to change the provisions of their policies.

Mr. Chair, that's number 11. I want to move on to my twelfth point. I had these 12 yesterday. Do you know what the crazy thing is? When we were here two days ago—it seems like two days ago, but it was only yesterday—I said I had 12. But do you know what's exciting? And I was thinking about this last night. Actually, there are more than 12 points that could be made. I have saved the big one for last, the one that I feel very passionately about and that I'm going to want to really make a pitch for here to my colleagues.

This really has to do with the whole local food, farm-fresh wave that's building out there. Mr. Chairman, some of my own colleagues, maybe some of my own colleagues right in my own caucus, who are farmers, when I first brought this up thought maybe I was stretching a bit here, that this wasn't necessarily a farm issue or directly an agriculture issue. Some of them pointed out to me the fact that I'm actually not a farmer and that I'm looking at things from a funny point of view. But I persevered and I said the funny point of view that I'm looking at these issues from is a consumer's point of view. I talk about food issues as well as farm issues.

Here's what I believe. I believe when we, as members of this committee or members of Parliament, talk about farm issues or talk about agriculture issues, a large percentage of Canadians, and unfortunately a growing percentage of Canadians, who aren't connected to the farm, who live in urban or suburban areas, tune us out. And that's not fair, but I think it's true.

I think that a lot of people, when they hear about farmers being in trouble, or this or that, roll their eyes and say, "Oh, there go the farmers again; we've heard this before", and they don't pay any attention because they don't think it connects to them. With respect to many of these issues that are on the table, if we change the language and talk about them as food issues, all of a sudden we have a much larger potential audience. Food is important to everybody. When you start talking about food, even people who live in our largest cities know that it is relevant to them in a sense. Even just from a communications point of view, if the farm and the agricultural community too, when possible or when relevant, cast an issue in the context of food rather than in the context of farm and agriculture, I think we can build and find allies, alliances. If that is old wine in new bottles, then that's fine.

This whole local food movement is growing. Again, I'll go back to our trip to Washington two weeks ago. I found it interesting. I think

on three or four occasions, at three or four different meetings, when we were talking about the U.S. Farm Bill and what we were doing there and international trade, somehow the issue of local food popped up.

• (1625)

I think in particular about when we were at the NFU. The executive director said.... I don't remember the exact words, but basically, when we talked about the future and what they saw on the horizon, he said, the next big thing we see is this whole focus on local food and food quality and food safety: where our food comes from, how fresh it is. We're learning more and more all the time that food freshly harvested has health and nutritional benefits that even that same food has that maybe has been sitting in a box or sitting in a box that's sitting in a train or sitting in a ship or in a truck and has been transported hundreds or thousands of kilometres. There are some advantages.

I think this is possibly the greatest opportunity for many Canadian farmers. I recognize that for parts of Canada—for example, out on the prairies and in the grain-producing areas such as where David is from—a stand at the end of your laneway selling wheat by the tractor trailerload maybe isn't something that's practical. If you didn't have to sell it to the Wheat Board, even then you probably still couldn't sell it at the end of your laneway. But where I live, an hour north of Toronto, most of my farmers live an hour—in the middle of the night, and probably two hours in the middle of the day—from four million people. There are great opportunities, I think, for local food.

I've talked to people about this, and farmers are bringing this to me. Some of them are what I'll call the crunchy granola crowd; they're the former hippie types you might expect to hear this from. But I've heard it from some pretty mainstream farmers too: the guy with the two-ton diesel pickup is also talking to me about the opportunities they see—the hard business opportunities they see—through producing local food.

It's not creating a wave; it's riding this wave that consumers are demanding. Consumers are increasingly sophisticated. Consumers are increasingly demanding more and more from the companies and the individuals who supply them with the things they want and need, such as food.

Just recently the problems with wheat gluten imported from China raised a lot of issues. It's some kind of crazy irony that it took the death of a bunch of pets to put food safety on the North American radar screen, but it has happened.

I think there are unbelievable opportunities for lots of farmers in Canada, for young farmers in Canada, to take a farm—where I'm from, possibly a 100-acre farm rather than a 500-acre farm or a 1,000-acre farm—and actually make a living.

There's a growing demand for it. What I say, when I talk to my non-farm constituents, is that I think there are a lot of good reasons why somebody may—

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** On a point of order.

While you check your BlackBerry, sir, I would point out that this is your twelfth and final point. I just wanted to thank you. It means we are finally going to proceed to a vote and discuss the report. I remind committee members that we have received a letter from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture urging us to proceed as quickly as possible to study the report.

As I stated yesterday, I have finished reading the report. In fact, I have read it twice and I have a number of comments to make. I want to thank Barry for making his twelfth point and thereby allowing us to vote on the motion and move on to Alex's motion, and then vote on that motion as well before finally getting down to the real business at hand. Of course, we are doing real work. I would not want to insult anyone by implying otherwise. Regardless, it is time to move on and examine the report.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Breitkreuz has a point of order.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** No, I just wanted to give the chair fair notice that I have some brief comments as well. Please put me on the list.

**The Chair:** I'll get to you guys on the list.

Mr. Devolin has the floor. I have Wayne and Larry already on the speakers list, and now Mr. Breitkreuz—and you, too, Mr. Hubbard?

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** I appreciate the intervention. I haven't before suffered from premature congratulations, but I appreciate it.

I am on my last point. What I was looking for here was a column that actually I put out about a month ago, and I'd like to read it into the record, because I think it's important. It's not long; it's only 300 words. The column is called "Buy Local, Eat Local":

Recently, you may have noticed reference to "local food" or "farm-fresh", a new trend in food production and selling.

As the name implies, local food is all about people buying and eating food produced in their local area.

In the extreme, some people only eat local food (goodbye coffee and orange juice). In most cases, people make the conscious effort to buy local food whenever possible.

There are three main reasons people give for buying and eating local food.

**Quality** – Some people buy and eat local food because it tastes better, offers better nutritional value and was produced under Canada's world-class food safety standards.

**Local jobs** – Some people buy and eat local food because they want to keep their food dollars in the local economy and support their neighbours' jobs.

**Environment** – Some people buy and eat local food because they know that the further food travels, the bigger its negative environmental impact (i.e. food miles).

The bottom line is that any reason to buy and eat local food is a good reason.

In the coming months, I encourage you to visit farmers' markets and stop at farm-gate stands. It may take a few minutes, but I predict you will appreciate and enjoy the local food you buy.

Take time to think about what you and your family are eating. Take time to think about where your food dollar is going. And take time to consider the miles your food has traveled to get to your plate.

For example, our family is happy to participate in a "harvest share" program in Haliburton. Every week in the summer my wife drops by a local farm to pick up a box of local produce.

Beyond the obvious food value, Ursula and I recognize that our kids are also learning where food comes from, and when different local foods are in season.

In terms of the future of local farms and young farmers, I also believe there are opportunities in the production of local food.

For restaurateurs, I encourage you to source local food – and let your customers know that you are serving local food whenever possible.

Local food is not the solution to every problem facing agriculture, but I believe it is a step in the right direction for both local farmers and consumers.

Buy local. Eat local.

Mr. Chair, we've all heard this, and I think it's a trend that is out there. It's always easier to ride the trend that's already taking hold than to try to create a new one. You can't help but turn on the news at night and you see parents taking over the cafeterias in the schools and kicking out the soft drinks and the fried foods—I was going to say kicking out the french fries, but I didn't want to say anything that could be detrimental to our potato farmers—and putting in nutritious, better food for their kids, and a lot of it is local food. As the father of two young children, I know that I'm concerned about this and I feel guilty when my kids scream at me to stop at the golden horseshoes along the side of the highway and we go in there and I see them shovelling that stuff in and I know it's not good for them.

I think there's an opportunity here. If you Google "local food" or "farm fresh", you won't believe how many things are going on out there. I know that a lot of these are grassroots organizations that have sprung up. Durham region and Waterloo in Ontario are a couple of examples where this is taking place. I'm not talking about doing anything that's anti-mainstream agriculture or in any way disparaging to the agricultural producers we have in Canada that produce large volumes of commodities that are traded internationally and exported. I recognize the value of that. As I said before, I know that local food is not a panacea for all that ails agriculture, but I do believe that it's a great opportunity that's coming.

•(1635)

I mentioned the poor quality of food that kids and others, including myself, eat at McDonald's sometimes, but I also note that McDonald's sells salads. It has to be a lot harder to sell and deal with fresh fruit and vegetables in that restaurant than it is with frozen hamburger patties, but they're a smart company, so that tells me they're doing it in spite of themselves and because they know their consumers are demanding it.

When I recently heard that Wal-Mart, which is in food in a big way, is going to move into organic, that tells me they've done their research and they see this opportunity too.

While I appreciate that some farmers, especially some traditional farmers, are very skeptical of the organic movement, and I'm not saying it's the be-all and end-all either, the bottom line is I see consumers demanding it and I see that there's an opportunity there.

In my riding, what I want to do is keep the farmers on the land. I want to help keep the same number of acres in production. The bottom line is that if someone can grow organic vegetables and sell them directly to a consumer—we all talk about creating opportunities for farmers to capture a greater portion of the vertical value chain—then I think organic is an excellent way to do that, as an example. There are many people who want to buy local food that's not organic, but they want to know where it comes from. They trust it. I live in sweet corn country, and my grandfather, who is a farmer, put the pot on the stove to boil before he went out to take the corn off the stalk, because he said every minute counted, and it was better if it was in the water within half an hour of it actually being picked. I think that's another opportunity that we as a committee should look into. It's my primary preoccupation in terms of these issues.

I appreciate the attentiveness of my colleagues as I've gone through these, and I hope that with one, two, or three of these I've managed to say something that might cause them to reconsider their support for Mr. Easter's motion and would cause them to join with me in voting against this motion.

Let's have a conversation about the ideas that I've put forward, or maybe some that I've missed that you've come up with, that you would like to see us pursue to create hope for farmers—young farmers, older farmers—across the country, so that they can stay on the land.

One day we'll look back on the farm families options program as a turning point when we decided we were not going to go down that road, which was to figure out how to get farmers off the land, but we actually redoubled our efforts to come up with new and innovative ideas, some of which require money and some of which do not, in an effort to keep Canadian farm families on the land. If that is what we can accomplish here by defeating Mr. Easter's motion, then I think that every minute I've spent on this and every minute that my colleagues are going to spend on this has been well spent.

Thank you.

•(1640)

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.):** In listening to at least part of what Mr. Devolin had to say, I question the sincerity, given

that just yesterday we were reminded that there was great urgency in moving forward with the approval and the continuing of study of the APF 2. Given what we're seeing today, again—this would make even bad bedtime reading and would put an old farmer to sleep—I'm sure that you wouldn't impress very many farmers with the kinds of things we've been saying over the last day and a half. I think this is a waste of time, when in fact time is running out on us and we may not get APF 2 done before we leave. I find it appalling that we're spending this time doing this. I find no sincerity in getting this work finished.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, Mr. Breitreuz on the same point, not that I see much of a point of order here.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't know what Mr. Breitreuz's is, but my point is that what Mr. Steckle said is exactly what was said yesterday. I agree with you that this is a waste of time dealing with this. If these motions were withdrawn, we could get on to the APF report. In the meantime, if that isn't the will from your side, the motion still deserves merit to be debated and that's what's happening.

**The Chair:** Mr. Breitreuz.

**Mr. Garry Breitreuz:** The APF report is a forward-looking direction that this committee, I understand, wants to take, and the motion we have before us is looking backwards. So it actually contradicts what my colleague across the way has just said. He wants to keep looking back. This committee wants to look forward, so I feel that what he has done has gone a lot farther than these motions do in furthering the purposes of this committee.

**The Chair:** No, we discussed this yesterday and we had a motion and we've organized our business....

On a point of order, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** I'm willing, if the other side is interested, in making a motion to table this motion so we can move on to the APF.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** We agreed yesterday, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. David Anderson:** If Mr. Steckle would go along with that on these two motions, we can move immediately to the APF. We can spend three-quarters of an hour on it today and get moving on it.

So if they have some agreement on the other side that we table the two motions until we're done the APF, I'd be willing to make that motion.

**The Chair:** We have a motion on the table from Mr. Anderson.

I can't take a motion like that on a point of order. Sorry.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** Can we get unanimous consent from the other side? It looks like they're agreeing.

**The Chair:** There's no unanimous consent.

Mr. Miller, we do have a speakers list here. On the speakers list we have Mr. Easter, then you, Mr. Miller, Mr. Breitzkreuz, and then Mr. Hubbard.

Alex, do you want on?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Well, I was on yesterday—

**The Chair:** Every meeting you have to get on again. Do you want back on the speakers list, Mr. Atamanenko?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I don't have faith in getting....That's okay.

**The Chair:** I'll put you on the list, and if we get down to you, Alex, we'll get you there.

Mr. Easter, you're on.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Well, I really had thought that Mr. Devolin was going to be the last speaker and I was just going to sum up on what the motion is all about, so I'll forgo that, Mr. Chair, and ask to be put on later.

I'd just like to make one point first. This motion is not about looking back. This motion is quite simply about trust in government. When government gives its word that there'll be a two-year program that will make a difference in farmers' financial well-being and when farmers are using financial advisers and paying the fees so they could utilize the program, just the same as you do with RRSPs.... You do financial planning using RRSPs. Mr. Miller said earlier, trying to basically leave the impression that people were using the program.... The program is there to utilize. They used it by all legal means. They intended to use it by all legal means, and now it's been withdrawn from them.

The fact of the matter is Mr. Devolin's remarks were not on the topic, Mr. Chair, and he seems to have forgotten that low-income farmers targeted by the Canadian farm families options program are missed in all those proposals he's putting forward. That's all I'll say.

I was going to hopefully close the debate, but I just couldn't resist the urge to make those points, because this is about honesty and trust in government, and farmers have lost trust in this government because they announced a program, then took it away 110 days after the fact.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Of course I'm going to disagree with Mr. Easter's last comments. This is about going back. Quite often, over the history of time, not just ministers of agriculture, but ministers in all departments get accused, as politicians do, about not listening. Here we've got laid out some happenings that were very clearly.... A decision was made by a minister based on criticism and input, some comments, not just from farm leaders, but from every opposition member or party and certainly from every opposition member on this committee. So the minister reacted to that and went from that.

Now, when this program first came out, being an old skeptic of a farmer.... I guess it's human nature for me. I always have a doubt when I hear about a new government program. Is it going to work? I think there was no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that a certain amount of this money went out from there.

But going back to the criticism, just year-long right up until right before the announcement, I was still getting criticism in my office about this program. Why don't you get that money so that it will get out and do farmers and producers around the country some good?

So on this issue about income tax filing and what have you, I want to make it clear again, I was in no way inferring in my rebuttal of Mr. Easter's comments that farmers were doing something illegal. We know it was within the legal means, but it was Mr. Easter who insinuated—at least I could take that, and I think many could—that they were cooking their books.

We were in the west, I believe, Mr. Chairman, when it was announced that this program was to be phased out over the next year. I know that from that point on, and it was something that I hadn't heard of at the time, many farmers called me to tell me that they were going to rework their income tax and refile it based on that announcement. I know that many have, because they've told me that. And if Mr. Easter's motion was successful, those people there—and I'm sure if it's happened in my riding, it's happened across the country—would be SOL as far as this program. So using that point, we would definitely be going backwards to go back and revisit this.

On another note again—

**A voice:** On a point of order, what's SOL?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Sorry, out of luck.

Programs by government and what have you are laid out there to help farmers and—

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I did not catch the meaning of “SOL”.

[*English*]

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Sorry, out of luck. That's it.

Even before I was farming on my own and still working in conjunction with my father, Mr. Chair, I spent most of my adult life trying not only to work in the industry, but make the industry better for everybody. I know I'm not the only one. There could be other individuals in this room, and there certainly are among the 308 MPs here.

I was elected to my first agricultural board when I was 18 years old. I like to feel that I've contributed. We're all here with the right intentions. But sometimes, as with Mr. Easter's motion, we can stray a bit, and I think that's exactly what's happened here. When you stray from the course or the mainstream, you usually end up going backwards. So we're going there.

Some of the things that I have to point out, Mr. Chairman, are some of the comments that the minister used to make his decision on April 20.

The National Farmers Union's regional coordinator, Randal MacFarlane, wrote:

The part of this program that really maddens me is that in order to get some reparation for the lost income on our farms, we farmers are required to access business assessment and skill development to help us improve our farm or off-farm income potential over the long term.

This was in the *Journal Pioneer* in Summerside, P.E.I., I presume, on May 10 last year.

Terry Plough from the National Farmers Union said: "It likely is a hidden 'transition' program to get farmers off the land...". We know that isn't true.

Those are just a couple of examples, Mr. Chairman, of the kind of criticism.

It also says: "or to raise their skills in order to get an off-farm job to sustain the family". Again, we know that was not the intention of the program, the minister, or this government. But again, that was the frustration level with one of our so-called leading farm organizations around the country, and that was in the *The Western Producer* last year, on August 3.

Ian Wishart, president of Keystone Agricultural Producers, also known as KAP, which I believe, Mr. Chairman, is based in your province, said: "I suspect that many of those farm families are working 24-7...". Anybody who's in the industry knows that to be true. Charlie spent all weekend at home with those Hereford cows with that many hours, I'm sure.

And they "have very little time to take any additional skills training", said David Rolfe, the vice-president. "They've certainly not sat on their backsides wondering what to do". We all know that. But again, this is criticism coming from a leading farm organization. He also goes on to say: "They're working as many hours as they can to make ends meet".

That's the thing. Going back to the comment about the 24-7, farming is a 24-7 job. No doubt, a lot of them put in those kinds of hours sometimes. And that was in the *Canadian Press* last year, on July 31.

I'm going back to Ian Wishart's comments about the Canadian farm families options program. He said: "It was written without consultation and failed to meet expectations as a result".

Of course there was consultation—

• (1650)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's absolutely true. Do you stand by that?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Absolutely not.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** It's just a point of information.

**The Chair:** It's not a point of order. He can't interrupt on a point of information.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** I, for one, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** You're actually up pretty quick, Mr. Hubbard, for—

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** If Mr. Miller thinks that five is more than seven—

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** Pardon me?

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, you have the floor.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't see a point of order in that, but—

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** I'd really like to know where you get that five is more than seven.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't know what you're referring to there.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** They're working 24-7.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, you have the floor. Please proceed with your comments.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** It's going to take me a second to gather my thoughts again. I was so rudely interrupted that I forgot.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Larry Miller:** They were talking about consultation here. This program was put in place with a lot of thought over time within the department and the ministry.

We all agree that the attempt was great. It was to try to address some immediate problems of low-income farm families. While it may have done some good, there were an awful lot of people who couldn't qualify for it. That came out in some of the criticism that we took for it.

To back that up, I'm going to have to point out more of the criticism. From the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, APAS, President Ken McBride said:

Though it sounds feasible and beneficial, Ottawa's recent splurge of \$550 million on low-income farm families only is a short-term remedy. With this plan, the government diverts attention from the deficiency in Canada's agricultural policy relative to the U.S.

That was in the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, August 22.

He talks about the short-term remedy here. Part of this program, as was originally announced, was to try to get—as I just said a few minutes ago—some immediate, and you may call it a short-term, influx of cash to those low-income farm families that were needing it the most.

But again, the reason I point this out, Mr. Chairman, is that it was simply another criticism of this program leading up to the minister's decision.

Mr. McBride also noted, and this is a different comment at another date, that "the initiative is only short-term and doesn't address the issue of the competitive disadvantages between Canadian and American producers." That's another issue altogether, away from this issue.

Mr. McBride said that "while the government support is encouraging"—so he does have a bit of happiness with it—"this kind of funding offers producers cash to buy groceries and fails to invest in their industry." This was in the *Meadow Lake Progress* last year on July 8.

•(1655)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** A point of order. I'm wondering, with Mr. Miller making all these quotes, is he onside with the quotes? If he's onside with the quotes, then he obviously was opposed to the program, which we never heard him say before.

If he's offside with the quotes, and he's in favour of the program that he's now voting against, he's kind of caught on the fence.

You can't have it both ways, Mr. Miller, either you agree with the quotes or you don't.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Is this a point of order, Mr. Chairman?

**The Chair:** I don't believe it is a point of order; it's a point of debate, Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I didn't think so.

In no way am I saying that I support these quotes. What I'm doing, Mr. Chairman, is pointing out the criticism that was out there. I'm also disputing that as Mr. Easter and others are insinuating, the minister acted on his own with no justification. This is some of the justification.

**Mr. Garry Breitreuz:** That's a good point.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't know whether it's appropriate, Mr. Chairman—but I seem to keep getting interrupted—but I could certainly put forth a motion that we table this motion immediately and go on to discuss the APF, if you'd like to.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Vote on it?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** No, I'm suggesting that we move on to the other area. It's not to vote on it.

**The Chair:** No, you'd have to vote on your tabling motion.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You can't vote on your tabling motion. We could break the agreement that you agreed on yesterday, but it's not unusual for this government to break its trust in agreements.

**Mr. David Anderson:** What was the agreement? We didn't vote with you yesterday.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, you agreed yesterday. We agreed on a compromise yesterday.

**Mr. David Anderson:** We did not vote for it.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You gave your word, and your word should be as valuable as a vote.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, I understand that you have the floor. You have the right to move this motion. So if you want to move the motion to table the motion in order to move on to the next one on the agenda, you can do that.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I'm going to continue on with my debate on the motion.

•(1700)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Filibuster.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Miller, you decided not to move the motion. You have the floor.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Just to go on, Mr. Chairman, I have to point out that this is proof in hard copy of the kinds of comments.

I have another one from Paul Mistele of the OFA in Ontario. Mr. Steckle knows him quite well. He said that Ottawa didn't consult the agriculture sector before launching the new Canadian farm families options program. Again that wasn't true, but it was the kind of criticism that was coming out there.

He said that he was skeptical about where the money to support low-income farm families was coming from. I know from my discussions with Mr. Mistele that he was worried that basically the money wasn't going to get out to farmers, and what have you.

Now, with the minister's decision on the 20th to phase this out over the next year, this money will be directed to other programs, which has been well documented here.

The new OFA president, Geri Kamenz, stated that it is an excellent social program, but the sector in Ontario doesn't want a social program. It needs farm income support programs. So based on that, that's where the minister is going to put this money.

He said: "I think a guaranteed farm income is abject failure. It will do more to create a welfare state than resolve the issue of rural poverty." That was in *The Western Producer* on April 12.

I could go on, Mr. Chair. Last year on October 12, OFA's Ron Bonnett stated that "there does not seem to be widespread support for this program." He went on to say that Minister Strahl, in announcing the program, has missed the key contributing factor of agriculture's income crisis: low commodity prices. In all fairness, no agriculture minister in history that I know has had much impact on low commodity prices.

But I do know that two years in a row, this government put record amounts of money out to farmers, and what have you. In fact, I remember that last year in August, we put a record amount of money out through the CAIS program, and there were still four and a half months left in the year. So I'm not sure what the final figure was, but it certainly was record dollars.

The money was put up by this government; announcements were made by other governments, but not really carried through. We made sure that this was carried through. That's going back to the \$755 million in the oil seeds and grains industry.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Just to be clear, I believe that the \$750 million was booked by the previous Minister of Finance, Ralph Goodale.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I believe Mr. Chairman, that this was—

**The Chair:** Guys, let's have a little more decorum around the table, please.

Mr. Miller, you have the floor.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** For the record, the money to which I just referred, Mr. Chairman, was announced, and farmers were told that the money would flow by December 1 of that year.

It never flowed at all until after the Conservative Party of Canada was elected to government on January 23. One of the first issues that the Prime Minister did was order that the money be released.

So there were two and a half months, Mr. Chairman, when that money could have flowed, should have flowed, but didn't. To this day, we're not sure why. Anyway, I hope this clears that up.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, I could tell the member why he should know that. It was because an election was on. The previous government didn't want to be accused of mailing out cheques to farmers while an election went on. That would be the first criticism you'd hit.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order; it's a point of debate, gentlemen.

Mr. Miller, you have the floor.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** They could have gone out before then.

Now that I was interrupted again, I have to go back and find my—

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** They knew an election was coming so they decided to make another promise, knowing they wouldn't keep it, right?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Without getting into election talk, that certainly seems like it would be true, Mr. Breitkreuz.

Here again is another comment that Mr. Bonnett, for whom I have a lot of respect, said:

I wish they'd done some more consultation with farmers before they went ahead with this program. It does not address the core issues we have been pushing, especially the need for companion programs.

This was in *Ontario Farmer* on August 8.

It's one of these things that is like the CAIS in its original days, one of those programs where some farmers will get a big cheque and others will be mad as hell.

One of these issues we heard about in our cross-country travels a month ago, Mr. Chairman, was companion programs and regional programs. It was pretty clear to all of us in every region of the province—in almost every province, but certainly every region—that we need some of these. That's another good reason for why we should be getting on to the APF report. The sooner we get talking about those, and the report, the better.

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture even has something to say here. They said:

...while there's no question that the majority of farmers need help, this program doesn't fully address the major issues facing the province's farming industry.

Going back to my comments a minute ago about companion programs or whatever, we certainly heard in the Nova Scotia area about regional programs and companion programs. They also suggest that this program may be another program that's "western-centric". I'm not just sure what they are referring to there, but obviously the main point of bringing this out is their dissatisfaction with this program. That was in *The Chronicle-Herald* on August 2 of last year.

Lloyd Evans, with Horticulture Nova Scotia, said that "the program isn't really much of a winner for Nova Scotia because many horticultural producers wouldn't meet the revenue criteria...". That, again, was in *The Chronicle-Herald* on August 2.

One of the things we found in the horticulture industry, which I have a lot of in one region in my riding, in our travels across the country is that the CAIS program did not work for these people. Obviously this gentleman, Mr. Evans, is quite concerned that the farm options program isn't going to work for the horticulture there. I know what the horticulture and the fruit industry means to Nova Scotia. So a bit more there....

I'm getting into some comments now from some of our own committee members, Mr. Chairman. The mover of this motion said that the government is adopting a "blame the victim" approach. We know that's a typical comment for Mr. Easter, but it's certainly not true. He goes on to say that "it leaves the impression that if these guys"—I presume when he says "these guys" he's meaning farmers—"just take a skills training course everything would be hunky-dory on the farm". That was in the *Canadian Press* on July 31.

You remember making these comments, do you, Mr. Easter?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Can I answer that question, Mr. Chairman?

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller has the floor, Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** They are absolutely true. It was an ill-designed program. And worse yet, you cancelled it.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** There was a skills part of that program to try to get some help out there to the people. Again, some key criticism of this program that the minister used to make his decision came from a former minister. Obviously the minister of the day has listened to comments like Mr. Easter's in making his decision.

Mr. Easter also goes on to say on August 1, in a news release, that this announcement is a clear demonstration that government is blaming farmers rather than farm policy for low incomes. Of course that's not true, but a typical comment from Mr. Easter. I'm quite sure there's no partisanship involved there in any way. More criticism is coming.

Mr. Easter also condemned the program for implicitly suggesting low farm incomes are the result of unskilled or inefficient farmers. If I were a farmer, I'd be a little disappointed in hearing from a member of the agriculture committee that he actually thinks there are that many unskilled or inefficient farmers out there.

I know this government and this minister certainly don't—

• (1710)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Miller takes those words very much out of context. The fact of the matter is the way the program was originally designed—and keep in mind it was designed seven months after the end of the tax year—was as a program that had a "blame the victim" context to it. But after farmers finally figured out what the government was really all about and started to utilize it, then 110 days after the fact, the government cancelled it.

So back to my original point, you started off by blaming the victim, which is the farmers, and now you've broken your trust with the farm community again.

**The Chair:** I'm going to read out of *Marleau and Montpetit*, on page 541. It does state the following here, in chapter 13:

A member may not...engage in debate by raising a matter under the guise of a point of order.

That's what we're doing here. Everybody is raising points of order, and really just engaging in debate. So if we're going to raise points of order, make sure they're points of order. Otherwise, Mr. Miller has the floor.

Mr. Bellavance, on a point of order.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes, I have a point of order.

Mr. Chairman, we can quote *Marleau - Montpetit*, but we need to understand one thing: when the governing party refers to something we said and names names, then we can raise a point of order to explain the circumstances in which these statements were made or, at the very least, to defend our actions a little.

As my colleague Roger Gaudet was saying earlier, these proceedings are recorded. At the very least, we must be given the chance to respond. That is what the members on the other side want as well. It is good that we have the opportunity to do just that.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Breitkreuz, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** Point of order. *Marleau and Montpetit* is exactly right. The members can make a speech, if they wish. They don't have to raise these things on points of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Point of order as well, Mr. Chair.

I take what *Marleau and Montpetit* says, but are the rules any different when the government itself is involved in a filibuster? Are there any different rules that relate to that, rather than to regular committee business?

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter, as you're aware, unlike the case when we're in the House, there are no time limits on speeches. We're a little looser on the rules. You are put on the speakers list just by notifying the chair through a hand signal or direct communication that you wish to be put on the speakers list. I have a speakers list that's prepared. Mr. Miller is on that list right now. He has the floor, unless we're going to raise exact points of order.

I would encourage people to get on the speakers list if they want to engage in debate.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** I have a point of order in relation to what Mr. Easter just raised.

**The Chair:** Mr. Breitkreuz, on that point of order.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** You may have to take time to answer this. I'm not sure.

At the end of this motion it says that they're going to vote on this, and that this motion then will be made a report to the House.

My question for you, on my point of order, is if this is referred to the House as a report, can the House then take and debate this for a length of time?

• (1715)

**The Chair:** As you are aware, any motion moved in the House as a concurrence report is a three-hour debate.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** Is this not the opposition trying to throw sand in the gears in the House to take the government off its agenda?

**The Chair:** I don't believe that is a point of order. Again, guys, we're getting bogged down in the debate. A point of order is a question raised by a member who believes that the rules or customary procedure of the House have been incorrectly applied or overlooked during the proceedings. So we're talking about process of debate as it's described by *Marleau and Montpetit*, chapter 13, page 538.

I would suggest we allow Mr. Miller to have the floor and finish off his speech and debate.

Mr. Miller, you have the floor.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Another comment I have to point out that Mr. Easter said on August 8 last year in the *Ontario Farmer* magazine, which I subscribe to, says, in Mr. Easter's words, "While any effort to assist struggling farmers is welcomed"—so he recognized there was an attempt to assist farmers—"the announcement made clearly demonstrates that government believes the principal reason for low farm incomes are the farmers themselves."

How can it be that...? I go back to that terminology that you're never almost pregnant; you either are or you aren't. So if this is an attempt to help farmers, how can it, on the other side of the coin, be the opposite? Comments like that are knocking themselves out a little farther down.

I'll give Mr. Easter a break for a while. I've got a lot more criticism that I could point out.

Mr. Steckle, on November 7 last year, said:

I'm hearing from a number of farmers who have called me about the program, and they immediately draw their conclusion that this is an exit program from farming—getting out of agriculture. It's a welfare program. Once farmers in the business, if they call themselves truly farmers, realize that their incomes are at that level, then they're basically not farming anymore. So this is an exit program.

Of course I disagree it was an exit program, Mr. Steckle, but those were your comments. I don't know whether that view has changed today, but certainly last November that's what you said.

Another comment that you made: "Certainly when you look at the second year, reducing that by a further 25% or whatever, then really it is moving that person onto the welfare roles." I don't understand. You're saying 26,000 farmers would be eligible for the program. We can pretty much determine that 26,000 farmers are going to be off the roll of legitimate farmers probably in the next five years. I'm not sure of your intent with that comment, but it clearly was criticism of this program. It says, "If you've deemed these farmers by their income tax returns to be at that level, we're writing 26,000 off the list." Maybe that is explained.

And the last comment on that is, is that an assumption we can make? I don't know. The part in there about income tax returns.... I think there has been a certain amount of discussion on that. I'm going to leave that up to somebody else.

Mr. Bellavance, some comments that you had made last year: "When this program was created, of course the Bloc Québécois said that it was not enough to solve the farm income crisis, but one cannot be opposed to helping the producers who are the most in need." So there's a bit of criticism in there, and then you turn around and suggest that maybe they were helping. But I know I have some other comments in here by you that I think are a little more scathing, and I know I'll come to them at some point.

For the sake of time, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to, rather than go through these.... If anybody wants to see any of these comments that they made, I'd certainly be more than happy to show them.

With that, I'm going to give up the floor.

• (1720)

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I was given to understand yesterday that this would come to a vote today in the regular time. Is this still on today, or is it not?

That's to the parliamentary secretary.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, on that point of order.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I believe it's going to come to a vote today. I don't think that's a point of order.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Today before midnight, or before 5:30?

**Mr. David Anderson:** I don't think we have anyone on the speakers list on our side except me. The only comment I was going to make is that Mr. Easter, as Mr. Breitzkreuz pointed out, requested that this be made a report to the House, which means that he is requesting that the House debate this for at least three hours.

We have debated it just over three hours at the committee, so I guess I resent the fact that we've called that a filibuster, unless Mr. Easter is prepared to do the same thing in the House and accept that same label. We felt it was important to have a discussion about this motion, and we feel we've made many of the points that we think are important, and we're prepared to vote. I know you have other people on the speakers list, so it's up to the opposition.

**The Chair:** I have Garry, Charlie, Alex, Ken, and Wayne.

Mr. Breitzkreuz, you are here as a substitute.

Mr. Breitzkreuz, you have the floor.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** I realize there are a lot of other speakers, so I'm going to try to be as brief as possible.

I don't normally sit on this committee. It's been a couple of years since I've been a part of the agriculture committee, and I realize it's one of the committees that has the potential to do a lot of good work and it usually works together very well.

My concern with the motion, and I've already somewhat hinted at why I do not like it, is that I think it's a tendency to look backwards. I think we should continue to refine programs and so on.

I know that the member for Prince Edward Island who moved this motion has come out to my area. I wish he were listening right now, because I was going to say that I have appreciated the fact that he did come out and listen to the farmers in my area. The agricultural farm forum that the member from Prince Edward Island attended was attended by many farmers. He had an opportunity to hear from those farmers. I appreciate that he did come out there, and he participated in a very non-partisan way. I thank him for that. I'm still looking for something that I can give him as a token of appreciation. I found some *Corner Gas* mugs the other day, but I don't know how he would take those. Anyway, I want to thank him for that.

I also want to say that in recent weeks I have met with a lot of farmers in my area. Of course, we've had some severe flooding problems, 40 inches of rain last year in some areas, and this year again, a high snowfall and so on. I was out there visiting and talking with these people, and a group of farmers wanted a special meeting with me. I got together with them, expecting to hear criticism of some of the Liberal programs that we were trying to make work, like the CAIS program. Instead, they had not one negative thing to say about this government.

I want to put it on the record. They said that we have not had this much attention paid to agriculture since the days of John Diefenbaker.

I was quite surprised at that, yet I think it's important that people know they want us to continue to improve farm programs. They appreciate what this committee does when they investigate how to improve things. That's why I would appeal to the committee to look forward, not backward.

One of the things they're excited about is the biofuel strategy and the potential the biofuels industry has. I guess some of them are complaining about gasoline prices right now. We're caught in an international marketplace, but they also see that as a potential for the biofuels industry to maybe help farmers out. There may be a bit of a silver lining in that cloud. Anyway, it's no secret all the things that this government is doing.

They're also very excited about the changes to the Wheat Board. This is kind of an aside, and it has nothing to do with this discussion, but they are planting barley like never before. I think it's good for this committee to know these things.

I just wanted that brief comment to be on the record. I appeal to the committee to try to look forward and not to throw sand in the gears here by passing this motion.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Hubbard.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Unless I'm mistaken, this is the third meeting in which we've dealt with this motion. If we look at some of the facts that were presented to our committee, we see that in that period of time we've lost over 200 farmers in this country. In fact, the evidence in our own report indicates that every year we lose 10,000 farm families who give up.

I'm not sure, Mr. Chair, I heard a good number of long talks, but did anyone bring to this table the number of farmers that would be hurt as a result of the cancellation of that program? Was it 10,000, was it 20,000, was it 30,000, or was it nobody? I thought the parliamentary secretary might have brought to this committee a brief statement of the four, five, six or maybe fourteen reasons, as Mr. Devolin had in his talk, as to why that program was cancelled. But we didn't hear that.

It's rather disconcerting, Mr. Chair, that in addition to all of our time, we spent over \$200,000 of the taxpayers' money travelling across Canada to make a report for the future of how the government would deal with agriculture. The report is apparently needed no later than next March. We have not made any progress on that whatsoever. I believe that our researcher has done a very good job in presenting a report, but I'm concerned that probably the most important part of that report is in recommendation 27. I'm disappointed that it isn't recommendation number 1, because without some idea of succession and some idea of someone being able to have enough money to invest to own a farm, the future of farming in this country is pretty well depleted.

I'm not sure what the parliamentary secretary has said about how long we are to continue before we are able to bring this so-called motion to a conclusion. In view of the talks we've had today, I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that for tomorrow's meeting we should have the clerk check with the rooms in the Centre Block and perhaps we should have these great debates like this televised so that the farmers across the country can appreciate all the discussions going on. If you, Mr. Chair, could instruct the clerk to do that, I'm sure that Room 253-D or one of those rooms would be open, and tomorrow we could continue this debate on Mr. Easter's motion or that of Mr. Atamanenko, and then the people across this country, the farmers who believe that this committee is doing something productive, would certainly be able to assess that belief.

Also, Mr. Chair, perhaps I'm one of the older ones on this committee, but years ago we had *The Benny Hill Show*. I don't know how many remember *The Benny Hill Show*, but Benny Hill was a great entertainer. I know that we have another document here by a Hill. I'm not sure if it's Benny who wrote the document, but that's the way we're following a procedure to screw this committee up. Maybe the clerk or researcher could look at Benny Hill and see if Benny wrote that report or not. Apparently there are about 200 pages floating on the Hill here that someone wrote on how Parliament can be upset and how we might achieve very little.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It was a government member.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** It was a government member who wrote it?

In any case, I could go on with a lot, but it is nearly 5:30, and I guess tomorrow we will resume to continue our debate on this

motion. I know Mr. Atamanenko certainly wants to be heard as well. But it's rather disconcerting that we put all that effort in and it seems that the government has no intention of getting to the important discussion we want to deal with.

I asked Mr. Miller if he thought that four was more than seven, including if you were lucky enough with the chair, which would make five on your side. But you must recognize that a minority government operates on goodwill, and it means it is a minority. It doesn't have enough votes to carry issues. Sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose.

**Mr. David Anderson:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in the spirit of that goodwill, I'd like to suggest that we make a motion that we go to the vote on this motion.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Sorry, you can't do that on a point of order.

**An hon. member:** You are indicating your willingness to vote on this?

**Mr. David Anderson:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** If that is the willingness, Mr. Chair, I would conclude my remarks and hopefully we can have a vote on it.

**The Chair:** It is almost 5:30 and there are other speakers. I have Alex, Ken, and Wayne on the speakers list, unless you guys want to waive your opportunity to speak.

I'm prepared to call the question.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I want to make one point, spinning off what Mr. Breitzkreuz said, in closing, Mr. Chair. This is not about partisan politics, not at all. This is about justice to a group of low-income farm families who have been disenfranchised of their right to a program that they had planned on utilizing by the government itself, by a decision made by the minister 110 days after their tax season. This is about justice for that group of farmers.

We're in agreement on going ahead with the agricultural policy framework in a report, but let's not try to say this is a partisan issue. It's not. This is about a group of people who deserve justice the same as any other, but have been disenfranchised by the government itself, and that's unfair and unjust to them.

With that, we would call the question, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I don't see any other speakers, so let's call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** We intend to file a minority report and we will look forward to doing that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, on that minority report, can you tell us...? We've run into this before from Mr. Anderson, from the minority in this committee, which is the government, in which they delayed the ability to table in the House by leaving it the full extent of the time they could and then not having it translated. So can we be assured that a minority report will be to the clerk and translated within 48 hours?

**Mr. David Anderson:** He'll have it by Tuesday's meeting.

**The Chair:** By Tuesday's meeting—

We have a motion to adjourn from Mr. Anderson.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** By Tuesday's meeting and it's translated.

**The Chair:** Okay, and it's been the common practice of this committee that the minority report is not longer than the length of the report the committee is filing.

The meeting is adjourned.

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