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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
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| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | N.D.P. |
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| TWEED, Mervin | Turtle Mountain | P.C. |
| WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon. | Swan River | N.D.P. |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a matter of House business, we are embarking on the new procedure, which is historic in a way and certainly allows members of the House more input into decisions under the new rules because the private members' resolutions that are prioritized to be voted on by the House leaders allow for three hours of debate to be followed by a mandatory vote on the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I understand there may be agreement of the House, in order to make up for lost time on resolutions and private members' business and, as well, given the significance of this, that we move directly to private members' resolutions this morning and that we continue through to noon hour, notwithstanding Rule 23(3). In other words, the Agriculture Awareness Day motion would be moved and would then be debated until noon today. It is my understanding that would mean that that resolution would likely come up for a vote next Thursday morning.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a willingness of the House for private members' business to move to a resolution dealing with Agriculture Awareness Day directly? Is there agreement in the House? *[Agreed]*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 1—Agriculture Awareness Day

Mr. Speaker: I will call the resolution on Agriculture Awareness Day.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk),

WHEREAS agriculture is one of Manitoba's top five industries, contributing approximately 10 per cent annually to the provincial gross domestic product and almost one job in eleven in Manitoba depends on agricultural production; and

WHEREAS for every dollar of net farm income produced in Manitoba, almost two dollars is generated in the overall provincial economy; and

WHEREAS Manitoba's agricultural sector and consumers alike would benefit from an increased public understanding of how the industry operates, including its role in providing a safe and affordable food supply and its importance to the local, provincial and national economies; and

* (10:05)

WHEREAS a number of governments and national agricultural groups have attempted to cultivate a better understanding of the agricultural industry through a variety of programs, including Agriculture in the Classroom, open farm days, AgFests, strategic partnership programs and Ag Ambassador programs; and

WHEREAS for nearly 30 years, the Agriculture Council of America has helped organize National Agriculture Day in order to increase Americans' public awareness and knowledge about agriculture so that every American has a better understanding of how food and fibre products are produced.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider partnering with producers, agricultural organizations, agribusinesses, educational institutions and government agencies in order to develop programs to help increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of Manitoba's agricultural sector; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider setting aside the first day of spring as Manitoba Agriculture Awareness Day in order to acknowledge the critical role Manitoba producers play not only as providers of safe, abundant and affordable food products but also in their role as key drivers of the provincial economy.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rocan: Mr. Speaker, how timely it is that, the day after this side of the House voted against a Budget in which the Finance Minister of this province made virtually no mention of agriculture, we on this side of the House are putting forward a private member's resolution recognizing the importance of the agricultural industry in our province.

The first goal of our resolution is to encourage the Government to partner with producers, agricultural organizations, agribusinesses, educational institutions and government agencies in order to develop programs to help increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of Manitoba's agricultural sector.

The second goal of the resolution is to establish Manitoba Agriculture Awareness Day. We on this side have chosen the first day of spring, but I understand that might be up for discussion. We thought it was appropriate because it marks the beginning of the growing cycle when most of the producers are purchasing and planting their crops.

* (10:10)

The key word in this resolution, Mr. Speaker, is this: awareness. The Budget that we voted against yesterday did absolutely nothing to acknowledge the critical role Manitoban producers play in our province. It seems that nobody is aware of their plight. Furthermore, by ignoring agriculture in the budget speech, members opposite are telling Manitobans that they are completely unaffected by the struggles our province's producers have had to endure over the last year.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, lower farm cash receipt for both livestock and crops in 2003 reduce net cash income by over 40 percent. Members opposite should certainly be aware that I have taken this information directly out of its 2004 budget papers for this

province. Yet, in the Budget that this Government presented to Manitobans last week, we also see increased taxation on accountants, increased taxation on engineers, increased taxation on diesel fuel, increased taxation on farmland and buildings. All this, after the Premier (Mr. Doer) said on more than one occasion that he was not elected to raise taxes.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) should know, Mr. Speaker, that all of these tax increases, which again the Premier says he was not elected to do, will significantly drive up the cost of farm operations for our province's farm families. Midwest at Carberry, Manitoba, cut the contracts of 26 potato producers in our province. This has left between 6000 and 7000 acres of growing land that will either have to be reallocated with the hopes that the producers will still be able to salvage some of their losses or sit completely vacant this growing season, 7000 acres.

The PMU producers have seen very significant cuts in their production. The cattle, sheep, goat, elk and bison industries have had the export market to the United States closed to them in the past year. Tuberculosis in wildlife herds, specifically deer and elk, is a provincial problem that needs to be dealt with in a meaningful way.

The hog industry is facing tariffs to the United States, a wheat tariff and other issues such as court action on water, threats of border closures on water flows and a rash of irresponsible statements made by this Government on nutrient transfers that have yet to be substantiated.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite know full well that these are the struggles being faced by our province's producers. Yet this Government with this Premier's insatiable spending habit is only driving the tax knife deeper into every farmer in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this week we have seen the Minister responsible for the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation (Mr. Smith) announce to Manitobans that his Government is spending \$100 million to install Cadillac VLTs in our province, again to support his Premier's addiction to spending. At the same time, we have seen that his colleagues continue any lack of commitment to fully cover the 40% provincial participation required under the Agricultural Policy Framework.

In the last two weeks, this Government has repeatedly ignored the Member for Emerson's request in this House to make that commitment to Manitoba producers. This Government knows that farmers only have until tomorrow to sign on to the CAIS program, yet they do not have the minister's word that the Province is going to commit to its full participation. Farmers deserve to know, Mr. Speaker. They only have until tomorrow to make their commitment. This Government should have made their views known a long time ago.

Mr. Speaker, this Government with its wrong-headed priorities would rather spend \$100 million on Cadillac VLTs than direct that funding to an area that could generate much larger benefits for the province of Manitoba. The Doer government has called all their staff members of the Department of Agriculture to a meeting in Brandon. This First Minister should know that all of these staff members will be armed with questions and believe me, Mr. Speaker, they will want answers regarding who is going to lose their job as a result of a scheme announced last week by the Government to eliminate 400 positions. The Premier should know that area Ag reps and front-line staff alike will be pressuring the Government for these answers. I can say with all certainty that the failure of the budget speech to mention agriculture is a clear indication of where this Government's priorities do not lie.

*(10:15)

With each day that goes by our province's producers are losing more and more hope that their Government recognizes the important contribution they are making and the pressing need to ensure the industry is sustainable. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, we feel it is of utmost importance at this time in the history of our province to increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of Manitoba's agricultural sector. This is why we are asking the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to urge the provincial government to consider setting aside the first day of spring as Manitoba's Agriculture Awareness Day. Manitoba's producers need the support of our Government and our Legislative Assembly. Agriculture is a fuel that drives much of the economic activity in our province, and it is vital that we do our part as legislators to supply that engine with the fuel that it needs to be sustainable and to grow.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to put a few words on the record regarding this private member's resolution. Indeed, I seconded the resolution because I think it is very important that we make other people aware about the importance of agriculture. I did not quite expect the member opposite in his bringing forward the importance of agriculture to be doing a budget speech. Budget ended yesterday.

This is a resolution where we are talking about the importance of agriculture, and certainly agriculture is a crucial element to the Manitoba economy. It contributes significantly to our gross domestic product and creates many jobs. It creates many jobs in rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, but the agriculture industry is very important to the city of Winnipeg. Just think about the number of jobs related to agriculture that are located here in this city, whether it be the jobs at the Canadian Wheat Board, the jobs at the Grain Commission, the jobs in the grain companies that are located here, jobs in the transportation industry.

As well, a large amount of the agriculture product that farmers produce is used in the processing industry. I think that is an area where we have tremendous potential to increase value-added production in this province. That is why when we came into office we changed the department to not only the Department of Agriculture but the Department of Agriculture and Food. In this term we have changed it into the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives because many rural initiatives are tied to agriculture. There is a lot of opportunity in food production using the raw materials that are available and high-quality food that is available.

That is why the member opposite talked about the meeting in Brandon that is happening tomorrow. I want to assure the member that we are not going to be handing out pink slips as their government was after the 1998 Budget. When they made cuts not only to the Department of Agriculture, they made cuts in many departments and handed out pink slips right after the Budget. I can tell you that we are a government that consults, a government that works with the industry, and that is why we are having meetings with staff.

We have taken on new responsibilities in the department and we are looking at how we can deliver better services to the people of Manitoba, the people of rural Manitoba who are the ones that use the services in our Ag offices, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this department will continue to play a leadership role in bringing the different sectors of the department together to ensure that we are working for the benefit of the industry.

* (10:20)

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I commend the member for bringing this resolution forward and that is why we have agreed to move it forward, because I think that it is important that we talk more about the production of food in this province. Certainly we have come through a very, very challenging year with BSE, with drought, with a high Canadian dollar, pressures on the pork industry; all of those have put a lot of pressure on. But I think the case of BSE is the one issue that made people more aware of agriculture and the challenges that agriculturalists are under.

I am very proud of the way Canadians and urban Manitobans supported the industry whereas in other countries there was a decline in consumption of beef products during the time of BSE. However, in this province and across Canada people had confidence in the safety of our food supply and, in fact, increased their consumption. I have to say that I also know that Manitobans like a good bargain and the price of beef was such that it encouraged people to purchase it, but that was very helpful for the producers because they had animals on their farms that they could not keep feeding any longer because they had reached the size where they had to go to market.

We know that there is a little bit more awareness of the challenges because of BSE, but there is really a lack of understanding of where food comes from. You could ask many children, I am sure, where milk comes from and they will tell you it comes from the supermarket, it comes from the grocery store. People are disconnected from the farm now. It used to be that every person who moved to the city came from a farm and had connections back to grandparents or aunts and uncles. Farm population has declined and there is less of that connection, so we have to continue to work to make people more aware of how

our food is produced, where our food comes from, and what the value is of that Manitoba farmer.

I was talking to my colleague from the Interlake, and I am sure he will use this comment too, but he talked about an individual who many years ago said, "The farm can live without the city, but the city can't live without the farm," because it is the farm that supplies the food for the city, but we have lost that connection. We have to, as a department, continue to provide services to producers and work with them to raise the standards of our food and make people aware that we produce safe food. We have to continue to have very high standards, but we have to continue to make people aware of how important agriculture is to this economy. It is a small part of the population but a huge contributor. If you look at the statistics, we know that there is maybe 3 percent of the population, some 25 000 farmers in this province, who contribute between 10 and 11 percent to the economy, but that does not include all the processing and manufacturing that happens because of the agriculture products.

We have to look at what the new opportunities are, and what are the other ways that we can use agriculture products. There is the ethanol industry. There is ethanol from straw product. There is bio-diesel, and, certainly, I have to say that Rural Forum is one of the places that we make people aware of rural issues. One of the best things that I saw at Rural Forum this year was a bus running on bio-diesel, diesel created from restaurant fuel. There are new areas that we have to work in, new opportunities that we have to continue to work at to ensure that we can see growth, we can address environmental issues, and we can also make people more aware of the importance of agriculture.

I talked about Rural Forum, but there is also the Red River Ex, the Royal Winter Fair, which we as a Government contribute to, to help to promote agriculture and make the people more aware. Ag in the Classroom is certainly an important area and one that we have added to, put in place new programming that will help students become more aware of what the agriculture industry is about.

* (10:25)

I spoke to the member about the date that has been suggested in the resolution and it says that the provincial government consider setting aside the first

day of spring. As I indicated to the member, we will set aside a day in spring, but the first day of spring will not work because that is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

I do not think that we want to be in conflict with another day, but I can assure you that we will pick a day in spring where we will recognize the importance and recognize agriculture awareness. So when I spoke to the member, I think that he was in agreement on that. I do not think that it is necessary to do an amendment.

I am just making the House aware that the first day of spring will not work. So we will consider it, but I tell you today that it will have to be another day rather than be in conflict, but we will look very closely at it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is a lack of understanding of what agriculture is all about. I think we have to do a lot more to talk about agricultural practices because again, there are people who do not recognize sometimes what is involved in the production of food.

We have many discussions on how we apply fertilizer to land. We have discussions about the by-products from the agriculture industry and how they are disposed of and the value that there is to these nutrients in production and growing of product. So we have to do a lot more, and the Royal Winter Fair is one of those places that there is this awareness.

There is one part of Rural Forum, and now I have just forgotten the name of that section, but in that section the various species of animals are brought in, sows are brought in and they have their weanlings, PMU horses are there, dairy cows are there, and the egg producers—*[interjection]*.

Through the Farm Gate, thank you to the member from Russell, I just could not remember the name of that section. It was an event that was started at Ag Days and has certainly grown. Certainly, those are the kinds of things that we have to do to ensure that people recognize the reason that a sow is kept in the crate, that people understand how a dairy farm works.

I think it is just a thrill. I have had my grandchildren at Through the Farm Gate, and they have had the opportunity to see a young chick just coming

out of the egg. They have had a chance to play with some other small farm animals. Those kinds of things, along with Ag in the Classroom and the events at Ag Days are very important. As a government we have been committed to those, we have increased our support to those.

Another important area that we have begun, Mr. Speaker, is different games, computer games, and of course that is a way to reach many young people in the classroom. The Manitoba Safari Game is a resource aimed at creating ag awareness in Manitoba and it is my department that originally provided the development for this program, and then it was through the support of Manitoba Pool and these kits were distributed through the schools.

Farm Gate to Your Plate is another resource tool that has been developed. There is a program for Grade 3 students called the Lunchbox for Growing Plants and that is as well a very interesting program where young children in Grade 3 are provided with kits to plant seeds and then see how these plants grow.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to continue to promote the industry. I value, I commend the member for bringing forward this resolution. I am very pleased to second it. We will continue to work to promote agriculture and encourage people to become more aware of it. An Ag Awareness Day would be very helpful, as will the many other opportunities that we have. Certainly having the World Meat Congress in Winnipeg this year will bring attention to the meat industry and make people more aware of how important this production is all around the world.

* (10:30)

Certainly with regard to reorganizing the department, I look very forward to the discussions that we are going to have with staff in Brandon and discussion we have been having to better look at ways where we can support the farming community but also make the public more aware of the importance of this industry.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand and support the honourable member from Carman on this Ag Awareness Day discussion, because, clearly, in Manitoba we understand that agriculture is the

backbone of the economy in Manitoba. The numbers of individuals that work in agriculture in Manitoba is impressive. There are some 31 400 people that are directly employed in Manitoba through the agriculture sector.

I think that we see in Manitoba a very strong group of men and women and children, because it is a family initiative, it is a family business in many ways in agriculture, through all parts of it. You can only sit back and acknowledge, sometimes in awe, some of the difficulties and challenges that our agriculture producers have to go through, but day in, day out, they get up and they work hard because they believe in protecting the soil. They believe in growing food to provide the best food for the world that will come out of Manitoba.

Those are the people that are the heroes of agriculture in Manitoba. I say unsung heroes because quite often when we rise in the morning, as we do, and go to our kitchens, we put coffee on and in the coffee we put perhaps some cream, maybe some milk. We eat bread to have toast and all of those things that we, well, I will not say take for granted, but the fact is that they are there when we need them. All of those things come from our agriculture producers, our entrepreneurs in rural Manitoba. I think it is very important.

I think it is also important to notice that it took a member from this side of the House, the honourable member from Carman, to bring forward this type of resolution. One would suggest, if it had not been for the honourable member from Carman to take the initiative to bring the Agriculture Awareness Day forward, the concept of having that, we would not have had that in Manitoba. Simply why? Because the other side, the government of the day, would not have thought about it, because they do not believe that agriculture plays that kind of an important role here in Manitoba.

I think the key word that has been emphasized by the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) is "awareness." I think it is a very important word that we should focus on. That is an education element, the awareness of why agriculture is so important to the province of Manitoba.

In the past we have seen ag producers understand the changing global environment. What I mean by that is they have gone out and they have

diversified in the way that they provide a living and provide a livelihood and provide various foods through different crop distributions for Manitobans.

In particular, I know that we acknowledge always that in Manitoba when it comes to all lines of food, Mr. Speaker, whether it be beef, whether it be wheat, whether it be pork through our hog producers, we clearly provide a safe, an abundant and an affordable food product, not only to feed Manitobans, not only to feed Canadians, but clearly to feed the world. It is a global market. We in Manitoba have the best producers in the world. That is recognized throughout the world because they want Manitobans' products.

The economic impact on Manitoba is huge. The economic impact on Manitoba is why we need to ensure that we have an Agriculture Awareness Day.

I know that through the times we have seen our ag producers diversify, whether they have gone into specialty crops such as beans and lentils, an area again that Manitoba ag producers are world renowned for or whether it has been people like Pizey's Milling in the constituency of the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach). Pizey's Milling has created jobs and an industry around pharmaceuticals.

I can tell you, when I had an opportunity with the honourable member from Russell to tour that facility, I was amazed at what it is that they were producing there, amazed in the sense that as I walked around this incredible industry, this business, these entrepreneurs that really started literally a job in their basement, I was amazed as I walked around that when I looked out the window I expected to be somewhere in the University of Manitoba or downtown Winnipeg. It was a hustling, bustling, high-tech business. But there it was sitting in an area that is creating jobs in that area, because they are entrepreneurs and they do not feel that they have to be in an urban setting. They are surviving in a rural setting. Those are the kinds of entrepreneurs that we have in Manitoba in our agriculture industry.

They are the people that understand why we must value the land because the land can pay so much back to not only the entrepreneurs and the people that they employ, but on a broader scale, it can pay back in the sense of the food that it provides, in the sense that it provides a whole other industry as

Pizzey's is doing in the pharmaceutical industry. And so, from that standpoint, we must have a day in Manitoba that we can acknowledge Agriculture Awareness Day.

I note that we see in agriculture and I note that, as echoed by the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan), the day that the Budget was voted on and passed by the members opposite, the Doer government, there was precious little said about agriculture and the future of where agriculture is in the province of Manitoba.

We find that our concern is that we on this side of the House have looked at various parts of agriculture and what it can do for Manitoba, and I acknowledge that we just had a Rural Forum in Brandon. I understand it was very well attended. I think it is important to note, and I am always fascinated when I go to those events, and those are successful events, that the government of the day, the NDP government, I am always amazed when they do not stand up and just say, "We were delighted that the previous government had the foresight to start something like rural development, Rural Forum, and we are pleased to be able to take what they have done and try to make it better if we can." Because it was clearly the honourable member from Emerson who was the first Minister of Rural Development and the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) was the member that started a rural forum. Of course we know that it was under the Doer government that they absolutely took away the Department of Rural Development. That was the decision that they made, and that is something that is clear and it is on the record.

We believe that Agriculture Awareness Day is something that is very, very important to the province of Manitoba. We note that for the first time in 2003 there was a 40% drop in the net income of our ag producers. So I think Agriculture Awareness Day probably serves on a number of levels. I think it serves for those people that live in—and I will say urban markets because I was quite surprised and perhaps shocked when I was speaking to some young children in a school and when the conversation came up about agriculture and somebody asked the question, "Well, where does milk come from?" and the answer was, "Well, everybody knows milk comes from Safeway." These are children that obviously do not understand that, without an agriculture industry, without a dairy industry

producing safe milk for Manitobans, for the world, that that is where we find that milk comes from. So Agriculture Awareness Day is a day to make all Manitobans aware that we are blessed with a strong industry here in Manitoba, that we are blessed with strong producers in the province of Manitoba.

* (10:40)

I think the question, Mr. Speaker, is that we believe on this side of the House we wanted to bring this issue forward because we are not sure where the current government stands with respect to our agriculture producers. We know they have diversified because they are entrepreneurs. As I said earlier, they diversified because they realized that they had to get into specialty crops. They realized that they had to diversify and expand the hog market. They realized that they had to diversify in various ways in terms of nutraceuticals.

When I have travelled around Manitoba and spoken to a lot of our ag producers, when there is a crisis that happens in Manitoba, as we have seen with the BSE crisis, as we saw with the farm bill that was brought in by the United States a couple of years ago, I think that we see an industry that says to the government of the day, "We have taken the first step to diversify. We have done what we can, and what are you doing to stand behind us and support us?"

So I think that they have questions of the Doer government because they want to know are you there to support us or are you not. I know the minister has made reference that this is not a budget speech, and it is not. But clearly, what is fascinating, when you have the Doer government bring in a budget and use a line saying that they will stand beside the ag producers in Manitoba, that is a line. Then they go on to say, "But we are going to put a PST on all of the services, all the professional services that our ag producers have to use," a 7% punishment tax, if I could use that word, Mr. Speaker, PST, punishment tax. They put a \$23 additional charge on vehicles that a lot of our ag producers have, obviously, for means of necessity more than one vehicle. So there is another punishment that they have put on our ag producers.

So we need Agriculture Awareness Day to celebrate all of those entrepreneurs in Manitoba who get up every morning and work hard regardless of what the conditions, what the weather might be.

These are people who believe in supporting the land. They believe in the ongoing contribution they can make economically. They believe in the ongoing contribution they can make in terms of providing safe, affordable food for the world.

It is because of those issues that we need to have Agriculture Awareness Day established here in Manitoba. I think it is fitting that we would have it in spring. I know the Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk) referenced the fact that there may be some difficulty about a specific day. That is fair enough. We are going to look for a day that we should have. I believe it should be spring because that is the start of newness. That is the planting season. That is the growing season. That is the time, Mr. Speaker, where we get a chance to go out and be creative, if I could use that expression, in the agriculture industry. It is about growing, nurturing and providing, those things that our agriculture entrepreneurs have gotten into and the reasons why.

I believe that Agriculture Awareness Day, Mr. Speaker, is a very important initiative, and I believe and I hope that the Government will support this initiative. I hope the Government will find a day that we can stand and celebrate. I would hope on that day, Agriculture Awareness Day, that everybody, that all Manitobans, those of us that get up in the morning and are fortunate to have the best bread to eat, whether we toast it or whether we eat it the way we eat it as regular bread, the milk, the eggs, the butter, those things that we reach into our fridge for and we bring out, that all of us would take a minute, not only on that day but every day that we get a chance to eat the foods that are so important to us that we get a sense to celebrate that day.

Agriculture Awareness Day, I believe, sends that very strong message to our agriculture producers throughout Manitoba that we believe in them, that we respect them and that we have every ability to stand and support them because we know they provide safe, abundant, affordable food, again, Mr. Speaker, not just to Winnipeggers, not just to people in Brandon, not just to people in Thompson but to people throughout all of Manitoba, to people throughout all of Canada, to people throughout all of North America, and, indeed, to people throughout this global environment, the world. I stand strongly with the honourable member from Carman who had the initiative, the foresight and the belief in our agriculture producers to bring in Agriculture

Awareness Day. I believe this is a very important initiative for all of us. I would hope that members of the Government would recognize it for what it is, a way to send a strong signal to our agriculture community, the economic backbone of Manitoba, that we stand not only with them in the good times, but when there are tough times, rather than just words, we are there with programs to ensure that they see another day for Manitoba.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand in the House here today and commend the member from Carman for introducing this bill and certainly our Agriculture Minister for seconding this to come forward to this House.

As has been mentioned by previous speakers, the agricultural industry in Manitoba is a critical industry for every single one of us. It has been mentioned, some of the facts and figures and statistics have been launched out there, that one in ten or one in eleven jobs are certainly reliant on our agriculture industry.

It has been an industry that has been faced with many, many challenges, as we all know, over the last period of time. There are many things that have been mentioned, BSE and many others. Obviously, the industry, with the reduction in the pregnant mare urine that we have seen in Brandon at Ayerst, has had a massive impact on industry out in my neck of the woods with the equine industry.

The Rural Forum that we just had identified the resilience that we have in Manitoba, obviously something that identifies with a lot of the people that are urban, in the urban centres of Brandon and Dauphin, Portage, many of the surrounding areas and certainly in Winnipeg. We had many people out from Winnipeg identifying the resilience of our farming community.

One of the things that struck me at that time was the children that had attended that maybe never had the opportunity to meet with rural children and see the rural lifestyles and what the industry is in rural Manitoba and the incredible technology that we have in our agricultural sector here in Manitoba.

In fact, there were many there, a number of folks that I had talked to down from the United States that I heard over and over again commending Canada and our agricultural practices as being the best in the

world, certainly able to compete with anybody in the world and compete with our neighbours to the south. In many ways we do have the best practices here in Manitoba. We have the best practices in Canada. If we had a level playing field right across our nations we could compete a lot better.

When you compete against dollars in the United States that are funded some 38 cents, 40 cents on every dollar and you get into the European markets competing against 65 percent, a lot do not like to call them subsidies, but obviously a 65 percent sponsorship in many ways by their governments, we still compete and we still come out ahead in many cases here in Manitoba because of the excellent practices and technology that we do use.

Through the Farm Gate for children was a good example, Mr. Speaker, of the many practices that we have here in our province of Manitoba. The treatment of our livestock and our animals is second to none anywhere in the world. I think it was interesting for my children and many others that I saw there to go through the practices that our producers have in the treatment of our livestock here in the province. Obviously, that is a good highlight for our urban neighbours and people in urban communities to recognize.

We clearly understand on this side of the House the difficulties that have been faced by agriculture. As early as last night the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), myself and the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) were at a meeting with a group of producers in the cattle industry that have been affected up in the Interlake area. We know the massive impact that has had on the producers.

There are a group of folks, Rancher's Choice, that are looking at bringing up slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba. I can tell you that I was more than impressed with one of the speakers who was there last night, a Mr. Munroe, that spoke. He has been in the industry for some 61 years and mentioned that he had seen this before. They have been through problems before and always the cattle producers and that industry has come forward.

This is one of the worst he has ever seen in his 61 years, but he said the assistance of the Province of Manitoba, the commitment that we have shown in supporting the industry, has been well appreciated out there. The producers have worked very, very

hard with this Government and this Agricultural Minister to solve these problems, taking it to a federal level where we have not had enough attention paid.

* (10:50)

I believe there is work to do; we all recognize that, and I was struck by the people that were there that have been in the industry some 50 years and 60 years, in Mr. Munroe's case, that realize that the capacity has to come up here in the province, and producers are working very, very, hard. David Reykdal and the members on the committee obviously have been setting meetings up throughout the province. We have assisted in that through our departments in Industry, Economic Development, Mines and Agriculture, and many of the other ministries in this province, and we will continue to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the resolution that was brought forward by this member, it is identified in many cases in the Budget, and I had noted the members opposite, certainly the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), who did not speak on the closing debate on the Budget and chose today to speak a little bit on the Budget. It is too bad he had reversed that. He had not asked any questions throughout the entire Budget debate, which I found very sad and alarming, actually, from a standpoint of representing rural Manitoba. That he did not lead off or start off with one question involving rural Manitoba, the agriculture industry, I found that terribly, terribly alarming and offensive.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell, standing up today and bringing up the questions is a little bit too late and—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I do this with some trepidation. I rise on a point of order because the minister has, in just speaking, put false information on the record, and he needs to withdraw that, Mr. Speaker. He accused our leader of not getting up during the Budget debate and putting on the record the concerns that we had. Our leader has been up every day asking questions on the Budget in this House and he just said that our leader had not been up. I want you to ask that minister to withdraw his

comments, because it is unfortunate that he would decide to put that on the record.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Emerson, I have mentioned earlier, as a Speaker I take members at their words and what they say is taken as factual. This is a dispute over the facts. It is not a point of prder.

* * *

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is critically important to our communities, and if I was on the members opposite, I would lead every single day with that question. Obviously, it is something that impacts our neighbours, and certainly, I know, their neighbours. A number of the members over there, I believe, are from some rural municipalities. This side of the House certainly recognizes it.

Mr. Speaker, there are a little over some 25 700 farms still operating in Manitoba. I know many of the members over there that would like to speak, and I hear them speaking now, and they will have their chance, obviously know many of the farmers we have within our communities, and the diversification we have seen over the last number of years has been incredible. We have seen changes in what has been traditional farm practices and traditional farm lifestyles where we are seeing many agriculture producers, not only working on the farm, but also working in the communities, obviously their spouses working in the communities, and the reflection that you see in that, the hours that are put in by people that are in agriculture nowadays to sustain and keep their practices, is growing.

They have seen in this Budget again, those families that are affected, the reduction in income tax for families, Mr. Speaker, for those people in rural communities and working families. I can tell you, the appreciation of that that I have heard from all parts of Manitoba, the historic reduction in personal income tax has been historic.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that we should have this brought forward, and I do commend the member from Carman, that it is a resolution. We do have to continually educate Manitobans. We have to continually educate people in the community of the

importance of our agriculture, and certainly highlighting this with this resolution is a positive step.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at about 50 percent of the food sold in Manitoba's groceries and other food stores, it is a derived product grown in a process from Manitoba. You can go into every single community throughout Manitoba and find the products that we produce here.

What I found of interest is Manitoba's recognition of our farming communities. Obviously, when we had the BSE crisis, when you saw it in other parts of the world, you saw a reduction in products and certainly you saw the faith of a product drop. I commend many of the members sitting around all sides of this Legislature on highlighting this fact in their communities, with barbecues, with our beef producers, over a very difficult time. We saw every single member I believe in this Legislature standing up at those barbecues supporting people and our producers in those efforts.

What we saw in Manitoba historically does not happen in communities that are faced with similar situations and nations that are faced with similar situations. There is the recognition that our producers make a good product and the confidence levels are maintained and stay high in Manitoba, not only in Manitoba but certainly across the provinces of Canada where that confidence in our producers in that industry remained high.

The support of Canadians and the support of Manitobans stayed very strong. I believe members working together on that made a difference. I believe that we recognized that, and we went out to all the barbecues, when every one of us I believe spoke on this in our local communities and when we identified the truth and the facts of the matter, not a political football for some political agendas to be launched up there.

We identified the fact that we have a good system of testing our animals, Mr. Speaker, recognizing it, identifying it and with science in putting that out there. We have got one of the best systems in the world. In fact, I believe the United States will recognize that in some of the moves that they make over the next period of time. Hopefully, that border will open very, very soon, recognizing that we have an ability here in Manitoba and Canada that is one of the best in the world.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution identifies for members of all political stripes in this House the importance that we have. A couple of the members opposite like to chirp from their seats over there about not seeing any reductions for Manitobans. Obviously, the odd member over there has been in business, and I am sure they must understand the principles of business, have seen small business reductions from 8 percent to 5 percent down to 4.5 percent, the biggest reduction of personal income tax in the history of Manitoba and balancing the Budget without members opposite robbing from rainy day funds.

It must sting a little bit when you see that balance and you see historic levels bring it down, and I know that members opposite like to say it did not go far enough or you did not do enough. The truth of the matter is it is historic levels over the period of time that we have been in government in personal reductions in income tax and small business tax, in fact, reducing the ESL and taxes that Manitobans were faced with while providing households with more assistance on the educational support side.

Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector that we have in Manitoba continues to find ways to diversify growth, and we look at the industry. Certainly it is interesting to note Mr. Simplot, years ago, when you read Mr. Simplot's book, he basically said that agriculture will be in the future, with water, the most important factors in everyday life, whether people come from urban areas, whether people are from the rural areas. The depopulation of rural areas has seen in fact young people now living in many cases in urban areas that do recognize the importance of that.

So I commend the hard work that our minister has done, working to bring forth agriculture in all communities. I know that it is well received, I see it all the time, hear it all the time, and this member's resolution highlights that as well. I commend him for it. We do need to bring ahead the importance of agriculture in our communities. We have to say that every day. We have to mention that every day. I would hope the members opposite lead that in their Question Period every day in this Legislature to recognize the importance of agriculture.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to commend and congratulate the agricultural community in the province of Manitoba

for the great job that they have done in seeing to it that we as consumers, and all consumers in Manitoba and indeed Canada, have the kinds of products on their table that we can respect, that are environmentally safe, that are probably recognized worldwide as the safest, best food products in the world that come off Manitoba farms.

* (11:00)

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate those primary producers that very often put their lives on the line to get the crop in, in difficult times to put the crop in the ground in the spring of the year, and indeed, those that have given their lives through accidents and others. I think we should recognize the importance of what those people did for us so that we can eat the kind of food at the costs that we have in respect of those that put their lives on the line. I think we all need to remember that.

Today, I want to also recognize the tremendous advancement that agriculture and the primary sector have made in this province of Manitoba. I found it interesting the comments that the government side of the House, the ministers that have spoken, and specifically the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith), and his negative approach to comments that were made in his presentation, and then calling into question the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), and in his questioning of the Budget and the response in the Budget, I found that very interesting why he would want to put that kind of incorrect information on the record.

However, having said that, I want to recognize the advancements that have been made in the last decade and a half, specifically the first 10 years of the last decade and a half, in the agricultural community. Twenty years ago, there was no bean industry in this province. There was a sugar beet industry, but trade matters and all those kinds of things made it impossible for sugar beet growers to continue the work, so they changed to the bean industry. That bean industry, by the way, in Manitoba has grown to be the largest bean-producing province in all of Canada. We are now becoming a very significant force in the international marketplace of the bean industry.

I want to say that the grain industry has grown dramatically in this province and has demonstrated its ability to survive in an industry that is highly

subsidized in the U.S., in the European countries and many other countries. The American subsidies last year to its agricultural community were some \$90 billion, and we in this country pride ourselves with supporting our agriculture through farm programs at a billion point one. Think about that. Governments' heads should be examined.

We should be competing head to head if we are going to force our grain farmers to compete with the treasuries of the United States and the European economy, and then turn around and say, "Our governments cannot compete with the U.S. Treasury or the European, but our farmers must." I think that is a sad state of affairs that the current administrations, both in Ottawa and in this province, the mentality they have toward agriculture and the primary sector. The grains industry certainly has come through some very severe economic times. The oilseed industry has faced the same kinds of challenges in the marketplace, having to compete with highly subsidized soy bean oil and soy bean meal worldwide, as our Canola industry.

I want to pay tribute to Baldur Stefansson today, to the huge contribution he made in changing the rapeseed plant into a Canola plant. The genetic manipulation that this man did by inbreeding, reducing the sinolate acids, the erucic acids in a Canola plant that made it far more acceptable to the processors of fried foods in the international marketplace, making it one of the most desirable oils, outside of sunflower oil, to be used as cooking oil. I think that is a tremendous tribute to Manitoba and Manitoba producers and the research staff, the support staff that we have seen take an active part in developing a primary sector, utilizing and changing primary products to the acceptance of the consumer in this province.

I want to congratulate all of those, whether they are departmental staff, university research staff and others who have played a major role in changing the way agriculture does business today. I want to pay tribute to the machinery manufacturers and the farmers who in large part have helped redesign the products that would allow us to change the environment in this province.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We used to see at the spring of the year, at this time of the year, that total fields were black, and if we had a wind like we had yesterday, a 70-kilometre-hour wind, this province would have been black from one end to the other. That did not happen yesterday. Why did it not happen? Because farmers have spent billions of dollars changing their equipment to a zero-till, minimum-till kind of operation.

All they get as a thank you from the Government is for the Government to hire 28 environmental policemen who will be forced to go out to the country and inspect every farm operation, tell the farmers how dirty their operations are, how we are degrading the water quality in the lakes and how we are killing the lakes, the rivers and the streams. We are attributing all that to agriculture. The Province has demonstrated how they are going to make farmers pay by hiring 28 policemen, sacking them on the farm community and not paying any respect to the past and how farmers have changed their way of doing business in the agricultural field.

The tremendous economic drive that the agricultural community has made, and I think the potato industry is an indication of how growth can be generated and encouraged by government if government in fact supports it. Yet, we are seeing, under this NDP administration, 26 farmers being driven out of business because of the reduction of the potato industry. Government is sitting aside doing nothing in this respect. What they are saying is, "Well, that is just part of the business world." We are now reducing potato production. We have seen a growth in that potato industry for the last 20 years but not when the NDP government comes. Within four years we reduced the industry.

Do not be too surprised if some of the industries will close: the horse industry, the PMU industry. We have seen nothing but a decline in the horse industry in this province. This Government is sitting aside doing nothing, not helping those farmers encourage the production of their business and encouraging it to be sustainable over the long term. They just sit idly by, twiddling their thumbs as if nothing has happened. The sheep and the goat industry have been severely affected by the border closures. Yet, the minister, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and others travel to Washington on a holiday to try and convince people in Washington to change their minds on border closures on the beef industry, the ruminant industry,

the sheep and goat industry, the elk and the bison. They cannot market their food and this minister and her Premier go to Washington on a holiday. Just a few days ago, they travelled to Washington again. When did they choose to go to Washington, Madam Acting Speaker? They went to Washington on the Thursday before the Good Friday. Who was left in Washington to meet with them?—[interjection].

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order, please. Could I just ask all members to have some respect for the person who is speaking at the moment. It is difficult to hear.

Mr. Penner: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I know the minister does not like what I have been saying, but it is the truth. All I am doing is speaking the truth. I am saying that the Premier and the ministers went to Washington the Thursday before the Good Friday, and it was interesting why they would choose to go the day before Good Friday.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order. I am sorry but it appears people either did not hear me or understand what I was saying. I am asking for the members to please respect the member who is speaking. I cannot hear. Thank you.

* (11:10)

Mr. Penner: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. Maybe there are some in the Chamber that do not understand English. Thank you very much. I want to say that the chicken industry, the supply management industry and the chicken industry in Canada have again similarly experienced very significant difficulties with the avian flu.

It has not yet hit Manitoba and I think we are very, very fortunate that we have been spared that. I want to say that the turkey, basically, and the dairy industries, the supply management sector I think has demonstrated how they can cause growth in this province if governments just stand aside and allow them the freedom to cause that growth by demonstrating how it can be done and how quotas can be changed from region to region.

I think that there needs to be more of that done, Madam Acting Speaker, that we allow the quota system to operate where the least costs of production are in this country and then move that product into

the marketplace. I think the minister could have played a significant role had she decided to do that.

I want to say this. I am saddened, Madam Acting Speaker, by the attack by the minister, two ministers basically in this Government that are bringing forth The Planning Amendment Act and The Water Protection Act. Those two acts are seen by many in the agricultural community today as being a direct legislative attack on the ability to operate their farms as we have traditionally known it.

The rights of individuals that have made huge investments in their primary operations are now going to be called into question. The Planning Act, for instance, allows the minister to decide whether an area will be called a non-productive area. Whether there is a farmer or a business that is situated in that area, they can be ordered to be removed by the minister under these acts. I think we have never seen draconian legislation like that enacted in this province before without proper compensatory packages announced at the same time that the bill will be announced.

I think it behooves this minister and this Government to explain clearly to the rural community especially what it means to be driven off your farm by a government without giving any consideration what their future will be.

This act clearly gives the minister the right to say, "You are farming on an area that will be restricted from agriculture and we can remove you." Those are the rights under this act, and I think the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) needs to explain to the people of Manitoba what a socialist government really is all about and how draconian a socialist government can be.

We have seen this kind of action taking place in Russia, in Ukraine and those kinds of things and I think it is time that the minister and her Government, the Premier (Mr. Doer), explain to farmers what it means for legislation to be put in place to drive farmers off their land without any consideration of their future. This is the kind of recognition that we are going to get from this Government on a day when we are about setting aside a day for agriculture. Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today, and in the spirit of bipartisanship I would like to just open my comments specifically on the resolution before us.

Of course, who could argue with increasing public awareness of the agriculture industry? Only 3 percent of our population are actively involved as primary producers in the agricultural industry, so we have to do everything in our power to make sure that the other 97 percent is fully aware of the role that farmers play in our society, that they produce all our food for us, that they are the base of our economic engine in this province, that although only 3 percent of them are at the primary production level, probably one out of every five or six or eight jobs in Manitoba is related to agriculture in some way, shape or form, whether it be truck driving or manufacturing or marketing or whatever. So to put forth a proposal to increase public awareness, of course we have to support that.

To designate a day, Manitoba Agriculture Awareness Day, in conjunction with increasing public awareness, of course we are in support of that. On that basis, as I said at the beginning of my remarks in a bipartisan spirit, I would go on the record in supporting the resolution as it is written, although I would suggest that possibly an additional "WHEREAS" might be in order, recognizing the role that our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, the honourable Member for Swan River and our Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk), has played in the last four years and specifically in the last year throughout the BSE crisis, the role that she has played in protecting and standing up for our producers in this Chamber.

Now, the Opposition, of course, could not maintain that spirit of bipartisanship very long. Within the first minute I think the Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) was tangential off into all kinds of negative comments and blatant false statements, as far as I am concerned, suggesting that we are raising all kinds of taxes and making it more difficult to produce. I cannot agree with that in any way, shape or form.

I will give you a good example. They are criticizing the Minister of Agriculture and the

Premier (Mr. Doer) for going to Washington. If they did not go to Washington, they would be criticized. I might add, they have been to Washington not once, not twice, but probably half a dozen times, and yet when they do make a trip, suddenly that is a bad thing. You know, there is absolutely nothing that we could do on this side of the House that would satisfy them.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

They purport to be such strong supporters of the agriculture industry, and yet for the first two days of Question Period on the Budget, there was not a single question on agriculture, despite the fact that the beef industry is on the verge of collapse in our province. Our producers are in dire straits, and yet not one question throughout the Budget debate from the Leader of the Opposition on agriculture. They were totally fixated in their hatred of organized labour in this province, their outright hatred of labour. They focussed absolutely on the expansion of the floodway.

They were so jealous of the fact that once again we introduced a Budget that conformed to their balanced budget legislation that that was their second topic of conversation. For three days, it took them three days before finally even the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), the Agriculture critic, three days before he finally put a question related to agriculture.

So for them to stand up in the House here today and tell us what grand supporters of the ag industry they are is somewhat galling, and I might even suggest grossly hypocritical.

I would like to just maybe focus on the beef side of things for a few moments here. We are all in crisis here. We have rolled out a number of programs over the last 10 or 11 months here. I know that without the freight assistance program, which put almost \$6 million into the pockets of our cattle producers, our ranchers, in addition to the low-interest loan program, probably 75 percent of the cattle producers, the small farmers, would have gone out of business in this last year. That is just one of probably eight or ten different programs that we have put on the table. And what have we heard from members opposite? What suggestions have they made to help us through this crisis? What have they come across with? The only thing I have heard from them, from all of them: "Cash advance. Let us give a cash advance."

* (11:20)

What is a cash advance? What is it? Why do they not define it? Why do they not put some terms of reference on exactly what a cash advance is? How much money is it going to be? Did we ever hear that in 11 months of debate in here? Did we hear a number? We did not hear a single number from them, just two words, nice little buzz words: "Let us put out a cash advance. That is going to solve all problems." No fiscal accountability whatsoever. How is that money to be recouped, so on and so forth? So not much in the way of solutions.

In addition to our program such as freight assistance and low-interest loans, we have also acknowledged that sooner or later the border, hopefully sooner than later, will be opening to our fat cattle, and that may be within the next two to four weeks, God willing. But the chances are that the border will not open to our cull cows and our bulls for some time to come, probably it could be a number of years, so this Government has taken action on that front as well.

I want to acknowledge the producers in this province, particularly the producers in the Interlake area. I will mention them by name: Mr. David Reykdal, Mr. Blair Olafson, and Mr. Garth Lussier from the Eddystone area. I want to acknowledge their entrepreneurship and their forward thinking in forming the Rancher's Choice Beef Co-op in order to purchase the plant in St. Boniface so they themselves have a facility to deal with our cull cows in this province.

Our Government is 100 percent behind that initiative. We have \$2.5 million up front, on the table, to put towards this project. The purchase price of the plant is roughly \$6 million and some people are asking us, "Why doesn't the Province put more money in? Why don't we just buy the plant?" And so on and so forth. I am sure if we did that, the members opposite and the business community would just be cursing us for intervening in the economy: How dare we get involved in the meat processing business? The ugly head of socialism rearing once again, or words to that effect, I am sure we would hear. Not to mention the fact that we might face countervailing duties and tariffs once we start to try and export this product. We have to be very careful in how we get involved, but I think \$2.5 million out of a \$6-million purchase price is not bad,

and to be honest, that is not the limit of our participation here. We are going to be stepping in with MIOP loans, as I understand it, to try and improve the infrastructure, and we will be working closely with the financial institutions, possibly with loan guarantees to make sure that this plant is up and running.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, where is the Opposition on this? Have we heard one word from the Opposition, one question from the Opposition on Rancher's Choice in this House? In the 10 or 11 months that we have been in this crisis, not one word on this. What suggestions do they have for dealing with our cull cows? What are we supposed to do with our cull cows? I would like to hear what their solution is. They have nothing; they have no comment on it whatsoever.

I will take it a step further as well. Where is the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association on this? They are the ones that are supposed to represent the cattle producers in this province, are they not? They are the ones that are supposed to be representing this province. Where is their support for this project? What solutions do they have to deal with our cull cows that will never cross the border for another five years, and everybody knows that? Where are they? Ironically, where is the president of the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association? That is what I would like to know. The Conservative candidate in the Interlake for the last two elections, she is silent on this project as well. That is pretty deplorable on all fronts, the Opposition and so forth.

I just went through the details of what we are doing, backing this plant up, and what are you going to do, sir? Absolutely nothing. Let us give them a cash advance, that is the solution. That is the be-all and end-all. All we have heard from the Opposition in 11 months is "cash advance."

Now the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), very articulate in discussing programs, so on and so forth. Has he, for one moment, ever attempted to define what this cash advance is going to be? No, he has not. Not a word, just repeating the buzzwords, parroting the buzzwords of his leader, "We are going to give a cash advance."

Mr. Speaker, that is not enough, and that is why they are in opposition today, because they do not have the answers. So our Government has stepped up

to the plate. We have bridged our cattle producers through this crisis and we will continue to do what is necessary to make sure that they stay afloat, and we are doing our utmost to get this Rancher's Choice plant off the ground.

As the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith) said as recently as last night, less than 12 hours ago, the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), our Deputy Premier and Minister of Agriculture, and the Member for Brandon West, I might add, the Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Smith) and myself, all travelled to Ashern once again, for the second time. For the second time we were there. The minister was there two times last year. We were there, and we, once again, stood up and reiterated our support for this project.

I would like to hear the members opposite, at least one of them, stand up and ask a question or voice their support for this proposal that is put on the table by the ag producers, by the ranchers of this province. I have not heard that in 11 months, and that would certainly encourage people to try and get through this crisis. This is the greatest crisis that the agriculture industry has faced in recent memory, certainly in the four years that we have been in office. This is the biggest crisis that we have faced. This is the solution to deal with our cull cows, and where have they been? Not a word. No support whatsoever.

This is deplorable because, in times of crisis, we are supposed to stand united here. We are supposed to put our partisan beliefs aside and show a united front. We are dealing with big issues here. We have to convince the Americans, the United States, the government in Ottawa, to back us, and when they stand up, one after another, and spin off the old Tory line, the old partisan line, instead of standing united with us, that does not help the situation. They have been a part of the problem, not a part of the solution, for the last 11 months that our ranchers have been in crisis in this province, and I expect they will continue to be so.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, standing up after the member from the Interlake who represents one of the largest cattle-producing areas of this province, and he started off not too bad, but as the vitriol began to leak from his mouth, I have to worry about how much help he has been to the cattlemen's association of this province. When he

chooses to attack the leader of the cattlemen's association, a very popular leader of the cattlemen's association, who represented that organization long—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If members wish to have a conversation they can use the loge or out in the hallway or in their offices. The honourable Member for Ste. Rose has the floor.

Mr. Cummings: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I think that was a hallmark of the crisis that has arisen out of the May 20 closing of the border because of the BSE discovery in Alberta was that cattlemen, consumers, governments, both sitting and in opposition government, have worked together to try and make this problem as manageable as can be under the circumstances. To allow that kind of a position taken by a government member against an organization that represents the best interests of the cattlemen regardless of their political stripes across this province is rather unbelievable to begin with. It undermines the position of the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), who has, whether we agree with her policies or not or whether we agree with her approach or not, really gone out and tried to make herself available to the public and to be part of understanding the solution.

* (11:30)

On this side we understand that. We just do not understand the direction that they took the policy and what their solutions were. We do not agree with what their solutions were, frankly. When the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) then goes on to talk about Rancher's Choice, I must admit that I do not want to make this overly personal, but my shares in Rancher's Choice are valid. If his are the same, then let him put that on the record.

All of the leaders in Rancher's Choice have made a long-term commitment to the improvement of slaughter capacity in this province. The Province, by putting \$2.5 million on the table, that seems like a very generous and appropriate position to take. If the Government is going to quote me on this, I hope they quote the next sentence, and that is that by requiring that \$3.5 million be raised by shares at a time when the industry is flat broke, when at a time when there is little or no cash flow in most cow-calf operations, that might be a poison pill, and I would encourage

the Government to look carefully at how that evolves.

It will not necessarily be for a lack of commitment. It could if it does not reach its goal of \$3.5 million. I hope that it will consider that there may be ways that that is where assistance would help push this over the top, and Government should not preclude that possibility. That is not to say that I will not do my share to sell additional shares in Rancher's Choice, but the problem is that the industry is cash poor, very cash poor right now.

I have to ask, and I do not know the answer, and I ask this very carefully, because I do not want to cause any grief for people who have been working to make Rancher's Choice what it is and take it to the next level, but how is it that we have now seen a track record of development of co-operatives in this province where every time at the last minute the co-op principal falls on hard times legally in terms of how it can go forward?

Two of them are in my area. Rancher's Choice is largely on the Ste. Rose side of the lake, as is the Arden elevator co-op that was being set up to handle organic crops. They had so much trouble getting the work done to meet the requirements for co-op development and get a certification and accreditation that they eventually sold out a major portion of the operation to a large, American private interest, even though they had enough money locally and they had the initiative and they had everything that it needed to make it go. What am I missing here? What is it about getting co-ops developed in this province, what is it about the advice that they are getting that is causing this grief?

It becomes so evident in Rancher's Choice. I am not looking for a whipping post, but I am saying in terms of getting it going they probably lost three months of initiative at a time when there was a little bit of cash in the industry. It is going to be a little harder to get right now. I will clearly put it on the record that not only are my shares paid for but that I fully support Rancher's Choice because it is an option and it is being done right if it is being done through the co-op process, but there is a risk.

The risk is being taken by the ranchers more than it is by the Government, and that is fair, but the risk is there. What is going to make this go is that the ranchers of this province, the cow-calf people of this

province are the risk takers and they will see this through.

I stray from what was the intent of the resolution today. The resolution in respect of agriculture today recognized the importance of agriculture, and I would take the opportunity to put some words of appreciation on the record about the importance of agriculture to the economy of this province, the importance of agriculture to those of us on both sides of the House who represent a large number of people who are dependent on agriculture, not only the producers but the people who work in the processing and the re-manufacturing or re-processing side of the industry.

I will expect the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) to stand up and talk about the cheap, high-quality foods that are available in this province and that they are there because of the competitiveness and because of the dedication and the good science being applied to agriculture in this province.

I will expect the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) to stand up and talk about the fact that agriculture and agricultural endeavour contributes huge amounts of tax revenue to the education system, and that he will do everything he can to make sure that the young people of this province are given an opportunity to be educated and to understand the agriculture industry.

I will expect to see the member from Wolseley stand up and talk about how agriculture has made gigantic strides in protection of the environment because I know that is near and dear to his heart. I expect that he will quickly acknowledge that compared to 10 years ago when he was a young child, the agricultural industry has, well probably that is the wrong term but I was trying to point out that he is indeed one of the younger members in this House and will have years in which to influence government policy. I hope he will think about today, the very issue of whether or not agriculture is the problem in the environment, or whether agriculture has moved forward leaps and bounds in terms of how it manages its affairs.

I would like to add a little bit of humour in this debate, Mr. Speaker. When I was more closely involved with the environment file and had opportunity to speak to some of my constituents or people in rural Manitoba, I used to get their attention by

saying, "Do you know what the most damaging industry to the environment is in the world? It is agriculture because it changes the environment, and it can be a monoculture if it is not managed properly." Agriculture has changed so much in the last decade, or even given the last two decades, that the criticisms that were mounted against agriculture have been really muted. In fact, I suggest they have been reversed in Canada.

What concerns me today is, as we have this discussion about the value of agriculture to our economy and the tax base of this province frankly, that we are also going to be debating some bills that will have an enormous impact on the future of agriculture in this province. They talk about protection of water and about planning, two issues that we will debate at another time and in more detail. I think we should acknowledge during this debate, when we want to talk about the value of agriculture to this province and to all of us in this Chamber and the constituents we represent, that we should consider the positive things that have occurred and will continue to occur.

I come from a community that is known as Mentmore. That name becomes more and more true as the years go by because when the railway went through, the people on construction would stop where they were putting in junctions or sidings and they usually, in conjunction with the foreman and the railway senior officials who were around, would take the opportunity to name the sidings. They looked around. There was not a whole lot there, and they said, "Well, this was meant to be more and Mentmore became my home community. There at one time was a repair shop, a flour mill, an elevator. In fact there were two grocery stores and some residents. Now there is one residence left and that is owned by a trucker who spends most of his life along with his wife on the road, so Mentmore has virtually disappeared off the map.

The railway is long gone. There is still a ridge in the road and across the field where the rail line went to the elevator. The elevator still stands. It is owned privately and will stand for many decades to come as a reminder of what was there. It will be used appropriately, but the community is much smaller and much less than it once was. The skating rink is gone, the curling rink is gone. That is what happens to a rural community when the agricultural economy

changes. We have changed as much or maybe more than most.

* (11:40)

One of the things that we need to remember in the changing world of agriculture and why I pointed to the three members of the Government that I did is that because of these changes the rural communities that depend on agriculture and those of us who depend on agriculture for our livelihood, we would like to think that there is an understanding in the general population about what that means in terms of your personal lifestyle. The post office moved on. That was very traumatic, but in the end that was not the most telling or important thing that changed that community.

What we hope is that agriculture, because of the importance in the community, that both rural and urban people—and when I say rural, I am talking about rural, non-participating agricultural residents—will gain some understanding and appreciation for an industry that produces some of the cheapest food in the world.

Canadians put out a smaller percentage of their disposable dollars on groceries than almost any other country in the world. That, when you tie it to the fact that we have freedom, we have democracy, it makes Canada one of the best places in the world to live.

I hope that today we will all, once we get past our individual partisan bantering, remember that those people out there on the land making things work want to expand so that they can keep their business going. They do not want to think that the old farmyard will disappear into a wheat field someday. They do not want to think that they are the cause of polluting Lake Winnipeg. They do not want to think that they are not providing, in the best way possible, the healthiest food in the world.

To that end, I commend to this House the recognition of a day to recognize every day we are well fed because of a very integrated industry that is very important to this province.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to address this important initiative. I do want to commend the Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) for raising this issue and

encourage all members to take this issue very seriously.

By way of beginning, I will certainly extend my thanks to the honourable member from Ste. Rose for his compliment on my age. I know I look like I am still a teenager and I have the energy of youth, but I am a little bit farther along than he guessed. Maybe it is the hair, I do not know.

I would also like to thank the member for pointing out the important connection between agriculture and the environment. That is the theme I want to use and which my constituents frequently raise with me in Wolseley. It struck me that there is a very large difference between what we heard from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) in terms of the improvements on the environmental front that can happen in agriculture and which have happened and contrast that with the comments from the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), where new, positive, strong legislation to protect the environment was railed against.

I do not know the exact wording, but Hansard will record that for us for all eternity, unfortunately, but there must be some very interesting discussions around the opposition bench caucus table, because some people, it seems, care about the environment and other people do not seem to care about it. I will leave it for the public to decide if the Opposition knows where it is going on this important file.

My comments today are going to be very rooted in the community of Wolseley. It might come as a surprise for members opposite that an urban riding such as Wolseley has a very strong interest and involvement in rural and agricultural issues. The strength of that can be seen in many different ways. Just as there is a lot of diversity when it comes to agriculture in terms of the types of products that are being produced, the types of producers that are operating, there is also a great deal of diversity in how those agricultural products are being produced.

In particular, in the riding of Wolseley, organic food is a very high priority. Organics have been growing worldwide at a double-digit rate for several years now, a trend which shows no sign of abating any time soon. Organic food production holds some enormous opportunities for our local producers. Indeed, many of them have taken strong advantage of that already. Normally there is a challenge when

you have an innovative product like organic food. On the one hand, a producer is saying, "Well, you know, there are going to be some costs involved in making that transition, and I want to make sure that there is going to be a market for my goods when I am done producing my organic food." Customers, on the other hand, are saying, "Well, you know, if you can get the food here, then we will buy it."

I really want to commend our Deputy Premier and hardworking Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). Within the first couple of years of her attaining her post after the 1999 election, she brought in for the first time an organic specialist as part of our civil service, part of our hardworking employees in the province of Manitoba, to help work with organic producers and help them find markets and build those bridges between the rural and the urban. There have been some very good results that have come out of that. I was personally very pleased to partake in a tour last summer that was organized by this staff person and members of the Organic Producers Association of Manitoba, OPAM. It was a tour of Interlake farming operations that have gone organic. We saw a very impressive range of agricultural goods being produced in some very innovative ways.

We saw strawberry farms, we saw hemp farms, oilseeds, wheat. Of course, there are also free-range poultry operations now in place, dairy products such as cheese. Organic meats are also becoming more and more available. I am very proud that here in Wolseley, right in the heart of Winnipeg, we actually have, I would say, some of the provincial leaders in terms of distributing organic food and organic produce to urban dwellers.

These stores exist right in the heart of my riding in the neighbourhood of Wolseley, stores such as Caulfield's, stores such as Organic Planet, which is a workers' co-op, Tall Grass Prairie, of course, which has the most famous cinnamon buns in the world. They not only use exclusively Manitoba organic grains, but they also mill the grains on their property. Congratulations to them for their recent expansion to a second store down to The Forks, where many travellers to our province will be able to see their excellent work. Of course, a larger food store, Harry's Foods, right on Portage Avenue, has established and expanded the organic foods section in its grocery store, providing even more access for these important products.

I would like to highlight for honourable members some really excellent work being done by one particular organization, because there is at the moment a cost difference quite often, not always. It is not always large, but often there is a cost difference between organic food and what might otherwise be called conventional agricultural products. The Good Food Club in west Broadway has done a commendable job and have been recognized as such for their efforts to bring organic food to people even if they are operating on fairly low incomes, and this is how it works. Members of the Good Food Club tend a small garden plot out by St. Adolphe. A local farmer helps them with those efforts, an excellent region of the province, as the honourable member will note, my colleague.

The people who work on the small farm are able to earn credits. When the produce is then available for harvest they can cash in their credits and receive very fresh and delicious organic produce straight from the farm. The surplus produce is also brought into the heart of west Broadway during the summer. On Saturdays the veggie van pulls up and offers bags of these products at a very reasonable rate to people available to come down to purchase them.

During the winter months there are also monthly cafés that are held. The prices may shock members, but this is what you can accomplish when you work as a community on a common cause. For low-income people, the cost to attend an organic cafe featuring organic material and food and sometimes even entertainment is \$1. If you are low income, you get a full-fledged organic meal in a restaurant setting for \$1. If you are a student it will cost you \$2. For anyone else it is only \$5.

This phenomenal work by the Good Food Club was recognized recently at a wonderful banquet held jointly between the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Organic Producers Association of Manitoba. I was very proud to attend that event and see the Good Food Club win an award, actually, from OPAM for the phenomenal work that they have been doing.

* (11:50)

I hope all honourable members will join me in congratulating their organization for their hard work to provide good, sustainable food on the tables of some very needy citizens.

We should also, of course, not lose sight of the fact that agriculture is one of the more dangerous employment areas, one of the most dangerous careers in terms of people's personal health. These dangers, of course, can come from many different sources, depending on the type of farming operation that is involved. Rates of testicular cancer, for instance, are amongst the highest in farmers. By moving away from hazardous chemical applications and certainly tightening the safety regulations around that good work which has happened already, those rates can be reduced, and organic farmers would have a much better chance of avoiding that terrible calamity.

So we are not just talking about the broader environmental benefits here. We are not just talking about the benefits of healthier people who are able to eat organic food. We are also very much concerned in Wolseley for the safety of the people who are making the food in the first place. That is never far from our sights.

Members have already noted some of the very good work that has gone on in the past to strengthen Manitoba's agricultural sector. I would just like to commend one particular individual, Professor Martin Entz at the University of Manitoba. I had the pleasure of taking his class, where we learned about crop rotations and the incredible competitiveness of an organic rotation or a no-till or low-till rotation compared to what had been standard practice beforehand. I really want to commend his work that he has done and which he will continue to do in the days ahead.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of giving some added profile to agricultural issues in our province. I certainly want to put on the record that the citizens of Wolseley and their MLA are very much in support of safe and environmental approaches to agriculture, now and into the future, which will lead to a healthier planet, healthier people and a diverse and vibrant, safe economy.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak to the public's awareness day that has been brought forward by the member of Carman and seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). It is a day which we feel that we can definitely support.

The agriculture sector is one that is very important to the province, as we know from the past

year and the years of before days of our forefathers that agriculture is an industry that has to be sustained. Affordable food, safe food, with March 21 becoming that day, being the first day of spring, is a day that would indeed be a good way to start off the year.

The Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) mentioned that the Opposition did not have much to offer as far as agriculture questions were concerned. His own Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) made mention, I believe, once in his Budget regarding agriculture. Even his own people are not doing all they can do as well.

Awareness is the key word here. The agriculture sector employs some 31 000 people. Prior to the BSE crisis with the beef being exported, with the United States being our biggest partner, it is somewhat not too surprising that they shut the door on us again, as we are suing them over the Devils Lake program. It does not help our relationship. We talk about the federal government and their blunders and then we go along and do the same thing. We wonder why we cannot get along with our neighbours, one of our biggest buyers.

The farm revenues are down some 38 percent from 2003. The income alone was 40 percent. The farmers are having a hard time trying to make ends go. The member also from Interlake talked about the drought. Lakeside and Ste. Rose and Interlake are the house of some 60 percent of the total beef population in the province of Manitoba. These businesses are also having a very hard time as a result of the BSE. The BSE has impacted not only the businesses but farm families. They are in a situation where they are trying to decide how they are going to make ends meet. The CAIS program has been another situation, Mr. Speaker, that we are not sure whether or not we are going to have negative margins, whether we are going to have limits.

We need to get these answered very quickly. We did get another extension, and that again puts more doubt in farmers' minds whether or not they want to support the CAIS program. Without those answers, Mr. Speaker, we wonder from day to day whether or not our farmers are going to be able to sustain the industry that is so critical. Becoming part of this agriculture awareness, maybe the people of Manitoba will take a better look at where their agriculture industry is going.

The Government has done a great job in satisfying the city people on the job that they have done in rural Manitoba. It seems that the attitude of the city people within the parameters of inside-the-Perimeter vision is that every farmer probably got in the neighbourhood of \$75,000 to \$100,000, which is not true.

You get out to the rural area and talk to the farmers, which I would suggest some of them do. Definitely the minister from Wolseley had some very good points regarding organic farming, something that has been going on for a number of years. We definitely invite him to get in the truck and ride out with us and we will show him what organic farming out in the rural areas is really all about. A lot of potato producers have been recently cut, some 26 producers have been farming organic for a number of years. We would like to invite him along to come out and see those and get involved in the agricultural sector.

The PMU producers, Mr. Speaker, are another industry that has had their production cut. Fifty percent of those got cut last fall, another third come February, and that is going to have a huge impact in the rural sector. It is money that will be gone out of the area forever. Some of these contracts had an average income of around half a million dollars, which is going to be gone. We have to try and find ways, innovative ways, to find the income so that the rural towns, the rural communities, the schools, their libraries, their day cares will be able to be supported with new ideas and new initiatives.

Not only the PMU producers are being cut. The bison producers, of which I have the opportunity of having the largest bison ranch in the province of Manitoba located within Lakeside, they are home to some 2000 bison. They bought shares in the U.S. processing plant so they could be competitive in the marketplace, and now they are shut out of their own market.

It is an industry that has had several different spins put on it. Again, they had no problem with their herds as far as the BSE is concerned, and there are tests that have been done there as well. They, again, are victims of this crisis and victims again in trying to establish their marketplace. They have done a great job, but the only processing plant we have available to them is in Alberta. Even under the BSE program, the slaughter program that was brought

forward by this Government did not work other than the money that they got straight from the Government.

If they were to have had the cash advance program, they would have been able to sustain and hold on to these animals until such time the market came back, but they had to kill these animals in order to get the funding. Once this funding was made available, they had to find this home in order to get them processed and the killer, of course there are negatives to everything, he knew this, that in order for them to get processed they had to get them to Alberta.

So, not only did he have to absorb the trucking to get them there, he also had to wait in line though he got nothing for this animal. All he got was the money through the slaughter program which is, again, another slap on the face to the bison industry.

The sheep, the goat and the elk industries are also in dire need of a good look. The elk industry has made several appointments with the Agriculture Minister's office. There were regulations that were brought forward and agreed upon. Once the

association had their annual meeting, Mr. Speaker, it seems that these regulations need to be revisited.

They are in dire straits, worse than that of the bison, I would say. The bison that used to be worth anywhere from \$600 to \$700 are now down to \$50 for that same calf that they used to sell in the fall. The elk producers, because they are only allowed to kill three of their own under the new regulations, it is not even enough for their own consumption.

With the regulations the way they are set up, it is not going to give them any more hope. What are these producers supposed to do? They have asked for more meetings and hopefully the minister will read this in Hansard and maybe their colleagues can help her by bringing this information forward to her.

The next thing we are going to have to worry about, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) will have seven minutes remaining.

The hour being twelve noon, we will now recess, and we will reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2004

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