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# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

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**Thursday, February 1, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. James Bezan**

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• (1540)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Carol Chafe):** Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum, a full house.

Our first order of business today is to elect a chair; therefore, I am ready to receive nominations to that effect.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** I move that James Bezan be nominated for chair.

**The Clerk:** Are there any further nominations?

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** I'll second that.

**The Clerk:** Are there any further nominations?

Seeing no further nominations, I declare Mr. Bezan your new chair.

Mr. Bezan, would you like to come forth?

**The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)):** I want to thank everyone for their confidence in me to take this illustrious chair. I think the committee, since I've been sitting on it since 2004, has done an excellent job. As was said, we had a great chair in Gerry, and I got to serve under Paul as well, when he was chairing the committee. We've often been able to get by our political differences and focus on the issues that are important to farmers. And that's what we're here today about—laying out the groundwork for this next session and making sure we always keep in mind that we're serving our agricultural community from one end and from one side of this country to the other.

We do have the planning of future business and a few motions here, from Mr. Bellavance and Mr. Miller.

I would entertain how you want to deal with this, if you want to go in camera or stay out of camera. It's your pleasure.

Wayne.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** I also have a motion coming forward for 48 hours' notice.

I think on the motions we've always dealt with them in public, but on the planning for the agenda we would go in camera.

**The Chair:** I do have the motion from Mr. Easter. We don't have to deal with this right now. It's been tabled, so we'll allow everybody to peruse it.

Does the committee wish first to deal with motions and then we'll move on to future business in that way?

Monsieur Bellavance.

• (1545)

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Are we moving on to the motions, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** That is what I understood. All right.

First, I congratulate you on your election, well, your appointment to the position of Chairman. I am sure that you will be able to continue in the same vein as your predecessor.

Regarding my motion, I call on my colleagues to support it, of course. I think it is important to present my proposal in the form of a motion. Indeed, during the holidays, I was reading *The Western Producer*, and to my great surprise, I saw that the Minister of International Trade, who is responsible for negotiations with the World Trade Organization, the WTO, was holding forth there. Of course, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food also participates, but it is the Minister of International Trade who is sort of our standard bearer for international trade and agriculture.

We know the extent to which some of the countries participating in the negotiations attack every aspect of the supply management system. The same holds true for the Canadian Wheat Board. Now, in the article in *The Western Producer* of December 21, last, Mr. Emerson was saying that the days of supply management are numbered. We are not talking about a simple quote, a single phrase where he might have blurted out something about supply management perhaps not being the best idea in the world and that changes had to be made; we are talking about a whole article in which Mr. Emerson, the Minister of International Trade, is delivering that message.

So, it's very disturbing. In any case, I think it would be irresponsible on our part not to invite the Minister to appear before the committee to answer our questions, even though we all know that the day after or a few days after the publication of that article, a press release circulated in which Messrs. Strahl and Emerson said they support supply management.

That entire interview is still very disturbing, and I would like to know more. I am also persuaded that agricultural producers of Quebec who are subject to supply management, and the others elsewhere in Canada, would be very interested in Minister Emerson's evidence here before our committee. I think that we should make it a priority.

[English]

**The Chair:** Is there further debate?

Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'm of the view that Minister Emerson has clarified his comments and has come out quite strongly in support of supply management. After that article went to press, he and the Minister of Agriculture issued a joint statement indicating their full support for supply management.

In my view, the committee has a lot of work in front of it in terms of items that have to be tackled. The agricultural policy framework is under way right now with some of the public consultations. I think that should be the focus, as opposed to calling Minister Emerson in front of the committee to clarify some comments that he has already clarified. I don't think that's a productive use of the committee's time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'll speak very strongly in favour of the motion. Clearly what we had in the original statement from Minister Emerson was a statement that obviously slipped by the message machinery of the Prime Minister's Office. We got some real facts in terms of where at least the Minister of International Trade stands on the issue of supply management.

As we can see from the government's attack on the Wheat Board, if you apply marketing choice to orderly marketing, then the same principle will eventually apply to supply management marketing choice, and if people requested the right to market on their own, as some are doing under orderly marketing through the Canadian Wheat Board, that same principle, no doubt, would apply to supply management.

What we've seen from Minister Emerson is the straight facts in terms of where Minister Emerson, and probably the government, is really at. I know Michael mentioned the joint statement. Clearly the joint statement, from my reading of it, was something that probably was drafted in the PMO, and Minister Emerson was ordered to abide by it.

This is a critical issue for supply management producers in the country. Minister Emerson made the original statement. He didn't deny the facts of what was in *The Western Producer*. He did massage it a little bit in his second statement. I believe we have to hear from the minister directly. This is a very critical issue for dairy, poultry, turkey, and egg producers in this country, and it also outlines the government's intent of where it will go in the future. We need to hear from the minister.

I would suggest, André, that we need to put a qualifier in there of "as soon as possible". What we'll likely get from this government is delay, delay, delay. I would suggest we need to look at it within 30 days.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Easter is trying to make this as partisan as he can, and we want to move away from that. Obviously the agriculture minister, the trade minister, and the Prime Minister made it clear that our party supports the present system's supply management system as it is. I don't think there's any need to bring Minister Emerson here. We'll be opposing the motion.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

I know the committee is somewhat limited in calling ministers from other departments. We can extend the invitation. I know that. He's not obligated to appear, but if we want to entertain that...

Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I would suggest, Mr. Chair, on your comments, that this statement is, in my view, of a serious enough nature that if Minister Emerson doesn't show up, then the committee has the power of subpoena. I'd certainly be willing to go that far.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Let's call the question. All those in favour?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** I request a recorded vote, please.

[English]

**The Chair:** A recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 2)

**The Chair:** I declare that motion carried.

Let's move on to our next motion, which was tabled by Larry Miller. Mr. Miller couldn't be here today.

Do you have a copy of it?

**Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.):** Both Wayne and I have spoken to Larry about this, and I have committed—and probably Wayne has too—that if he wasn't able to be here, we would take that motion forward under our name. We're supportive of the motion, by the way. But we're not trying to steal it from you guys.

**Mr. David Anderson:** You're comfortable with the motion going ahead.

Hon. Wayne Easter: We're comfortable with the motion going ahead even though Larry is not here.

**The Chair:** Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I just wanted to....

**The Chair:** You have the floor, Mike.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Do we have agreement, though?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** All the committee members say they agree. I agree with Larry's motion and I have no objection to our discussing it immediately, except that I want to make a small addition to his motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** First of all, let's get this on the floor if we're going to have debate.

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I am proposing, with agreement. Mr. Miller and I spoke last evening and he indicated he wouldn't be here today. I said I would take that motion forward. If that is okay, I will present the motion at this time.

**The Chair:** So it's moved by Mr. Steckle.

Mr. Boshcoff.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, is the intent to name communities at this time, should the motion carry?

• (1555)

**The Chair:** It doesn't name; it just includes central Ontario. That's what they're suggesting. It's just a directive to the government, I believe.

Do you want to speak to the motion first, Mr. Steckle?

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Mr. Miller called me about this matter because there weren't any communities north of the 401 corridor that were accommodating farmers from that area. He wanted us to find a place somewhere between Walkerton and Durham or up in Markdale. Hanover would be a possibility. I said I was not so concerned; it's not so important to me to name that community, because it may not work. They have to, first of all, find a place where they can do that.

Mr. Chong lives up in that area as well. There are obviously communities where they can accommodate and probably communities where they can't accommodate. But I think we need to ask for more places, and perhaps not only one but a number of communities, because farmers have a limitation to where they go. The leadership of farm organizations will drive extensively, but the average farmer won't drive beyond a certain distance.

So I'm not so concerned if they want to do that. I'm just putting the concept in the form of this resolution before the floor, and if you want to change it and detail it, that's fine by me also.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** As I tried to explain just now, I am in complete agreement with this motion.

However, when I read it, I thought about adding what is known as a friendly amendment. I agree completely with Larry. There are areas that are neglected. I don't want to add a shopping list to his motion. I understand very well that the department must pick certain areas. In Quebec, however, the consultation committee is stopping in a single area, in Saint-Hyacinthe, on February 8. Now that is in the Montréal region, and thus in the Montreal region. It only sits a single time in Quebec.

We could add a consultation session—a bit like Larry is doing for central Ontario—in the Quebec City region. In my opinion, some MPs from the Quebec City region think that agricultural producers would have less distance to cover in order to be heard. That was already done during the first consultations, but they were held in

private, on invitation. Individuals travelled to the Quebec City region, but here, there is only one location planned for the public consultation.

Unfortunately, Larry is absent, and I would really have liked to discuss it with him. I don't want to amend his motion, but I would like to add the words "and in the Quebec City region." I don't want to specify a town or location. I would like to do like Larry did when he mentioned central Ontario, and add the words "and in the Quebec City region."

[English]

**The Chair:** It's a friendly amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** This is a question for André. I'm told that the reason there's only one federal meeting there is because the provinces agreed to run meetings on the same issues. Is that correct?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** The Government of Quebec did set up a commission. Of course, the issues are going to overlap, but as you know, the federal government has its own issues.

The Agricultural Policy Framework really concerns the federal government. The Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program, the CAIS program, is a federal program. My goal was not to interfere in any way with the commission set up by the Government of Quebec; it was to add another geographical location. When Larry presented his motion, I thought it might be possible to add some consultations at a few locations.

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay.

It's just that I understood that both sets of meetings were set up together so that they would work together. But you're saying that you'd like to have more federal meetings, specifically federal meetings, in Quebec. The federal and provincial meetings were set up to work together, but you would like to see more federal meetings in Quebec. Is that correct?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** No. You're telling me that there may be an agreement with the Government of Quebec, which is conducting its own consultation. But I say that the federal minister's consultation will not necessarily cover the same issues, the same requests, the same subjects. It is another order of government. I don't know whether someone in the Government of Quebec told them to come to Quebec City only once, that that was enough.

I think that holding such a major consultation in only one location on one date is not enough. I am making my proposal because I am concerned about equity for the agricultural producers in the other part of Quebec; Quebec is a big place.

David, I have no idea how many consultations are planned in Saskatchewan and in the other provinces. I have no idea. Are there four?

•(1600)

[English]

**The Chair:** We have a request here for a friendly amendment. Mr. Bellavance would make it that in central Quebec, the Quebec City area would be brought into the consultation as well on that issue. Does anybody see an issue in raising that as a friendly amendment?

Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'm fine with the amendment raised.

I just also want to add that I support what Paul said in regard to this motion.

**The Chair:** Let's first deal with the amendment.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'm fine with the friendly amendment.

**The Chair:** There's no dissent.

Okay, let's go on to debate the motion.

I think Mr. Atamanenko is first, and then we'll have Mr. Chong.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** I'm just not quite clear about what's happening. There are consultations going on in this country. Who's doing the consultations? I understand that there are four consultations in Saskatchewan. I'm not sure what's.... Maybe somebody could bring me up to date on this.

**The Chair:** Mr. Parliamentary Secretary, do you want to address that?

**Mr. David Anderson:** The federal government is doing consultations on the APF, the next agriculture policy, and they've gone through one level of consulting with the farm organizations. They're now at the level of trying to consult with the producers on the ground. There's been some concern that there aren't enough meetings scheduled to meet directly with producers. There will be further consultations, and there's an online consultation opportunity as well. So the complaint has been that there haven't been enough producer meetings set up in enough locations so that producers are able to access that whole process. Is that fair?

**The Chair:** Off the top of your head, do you know how many meetings are being held across the country?

**Mr. David Anderson:** No.

**The Chair:** Let's go in order.

I have Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I want to support this motion. And I just want to make the point as well that Ontario has about 60,000 farms, and the overwhelming majority of those farms are located west of Highway 400 in southwestern Ontario, and two meetings aren't enough. We need far more than just two meetings for that entire region, where the overwhelming majority of those 60,000 farms are located.

To get from northern Bruce County or Grey County to Woodstock takes close to two to two and a half hours and sometimes three hours. So I think it's reasonable to get a third meeting somewhere in that central part of the region, somewhere north of London and Woodstock, so that farmers don't have to drive as far. It's far and away the most important agricultural region in the province.

**The Chair:** Mr. Boshcoff.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with all the previous speakers. I believe when I first read the directive that came out about it explaining the process, it's somewhere between 12 or 14 across the country. It seems to me that this is hopelessly inadequate given the idea that the federations of agriculture between, let's say, the Manitoba border and Sudbury are essentially without representation. The drive covers a distance of about 18 hours if you don't stop, meaning that you've probably got an area twice the size of France, to give you some perspective on it. So they're feeling somewhat frustrated that they can't do the hands-on thing. I think we all agree, and it seems like there's a consensus already, Mr. Chair, that we need them more geographically suited to where there is agriculture and farming and agribusiness.

I'm going to propose one for somewhere in the northwest of Ontario between Winnipeg and Sudbury, and I believe both have meetings scheduled.

**The Chair:** Another friendly amendment?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Can I speak to the amendment?

The way it's worded right now, it doesn't specifically list any location. I think we should keep it general that way, otherwise if we start listing locations, we're going to be here forever. The wording, including the friendly amendment from André, just says that we need more locations, period. It says, "including...such as Ontario and Quebec". If we keep it general, then we don't hamstring anybody down the line who's going to actually source these locations.

•(1605)

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, I agree with the amendment, and I agree with Michael. I think it is a recommendation to the minister, and probably also to the parliamentary secretaries here, and I imagine you're hearing it in your area as well. I've heard a lot of dissatisfaction with the one location in the Maritimes. That one's over now, and I don't think there's any sense going back to it in that particular area. But there aren't enough locations.

I think this recommendation is just saying, with the amendment to it, that if the minister, and maybe David and a couple of others, could sit down and find more locations, maybe it will end up being two in Ontario and one in Quebec, and maybe even in B.C. I don't know, Alex.

The department, in its original first blush on this, laid out a series of consultations, and we do think they need to be added to, and I think we'd have confidence that you'd add to them in a more convenient location so that people could get out.

**The Chair:** Is everybody ready for the vote?

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** In accommodation to Ken and his northern Ontario concerns, if we were to name Quebec and northern Ontario along with northwestern Ontario, along with central Ontario, then we've basically covered all the bases, and that would come under one amendment, and it accommodates what Michael is trying to say.

To think that we would look at Sudbury and Toronto as centres where we would hold consultations on agriculture—this is not a reflection of anyone in this room, but it's certainly a reflection of the department. This has been going on for years and years and years, and I have some real concerns about it. I guess from that sense I think we need to speak to this to the point where we find accommodations for those who simply just wouldn't be there otherwise if it weren't for more accommodating places.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments before we ask the question?

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think it will probably be easier the fewer amendments we make, but if people want to keep adding their home location, that's up to them. I'll work on it.

**The Chair:** Okay. The clerk will read what we have here as the amended motion.

**The Clerk:** And I'm willing to take clarification. The motion reads:

That, the committee makes the recommendation that the Minister of Agriculture should add locations for the public consultations to be held on the Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-food policy and that those locations be in more rural and accessible areas to the farming community, including central and northwestern Ontario and the Quebec City area.

**The Chair:** Are you ready for the question?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** That brings the motions to a close.

I believe we should move in camera to discuss future business.

Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** The motion I put forward is for 48 hours' notice, so it will be dealt with on Tuesday.

**The Chair:** It's just tabled. We'll deal with that on Tuesday of next week.

We will suspend the proceedings so we can clear the room.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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