

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we next return to the study of Bill C-50, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River will have 10 more minutes.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ) moved that Bill C-517, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with emotion and pleasure that I speak to you and my colleagues in this House to express my point of view on genetically modified foods.

I would ask for your indulgence as I make a brief aside in my speech to commend two young people in my riding, Claire and Norbert. On December 11, they sent me an email, which I have before me, encouraging me to ensure mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods. Claire and Norbert even called me at my office and, together with their teacher, Marcel Parizeau—whom I salute this evening—invited me to discuss this with them. This was a very pleasant meeting. To my great surprise—you too will be surprised, Mr. Speaker—Claire and Norbert, who I met with at the Coeur à Coeur alternative school in Saint Eustache, are roughly 12 years old. I was surprised that young people that age had concerns about the food they eat.

I would also like to pay tribute to and thank my friend from Brossard—La Prairie, for supporting this bill.

Bill C-517 before us this evening is not an original bill. This is a topic that has been dear to the Bloc Québécois for many years. The hon. member for Drummond, in 1993 and 1994, had concerns about genetically modified foods. In 1999, my friend, Hélène Alarie—who is surely watching me this evening because I told her I was going to talk about this—tabled a bill in this House. By the way, Hélène was the first female certified agronomist in Canada. Ms. Alarie could speak at length about genetically modified organisms. I salute you, Hélène.

In 2001, an hon. Liberal member, Mr. Ciaccia—if my memory serves me correctly—tabled a bill calling on the government for mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.

The summary of this bill reads:

This enactment amends the Food and Drugs Act to make the Minister of Health responsible for establishing that a food or one or more of its components has been genetically modified. If it is established that a food or one or more of its components has been genetically modified, the Minister shall cause the name of the food to be published in the Canada Gazette. The Minister shall also prepare a list of all such foods and cause a copy to be sent at no cost to any one who requests it.

No one may sell this food or a food product containing this food in a package unless a label is affixed to the package containing the following notice:

This product or one or more of its components has been genetically modified—

In addition, no one may sell this food or a food product containing this food in a package unless a poster in the prescribed form has been placed near the food containing the following notice:

Genetically modified—

• (1735)

The main goal of this bill is not to put genetically modified foods on trial, but to inform consumers about what they are eating and to give them a choice between consuming genetically modified foods or not. That is a democratic choice.

This is bound to be a very popular bill, and I invite all members of this House to read their local papers to find out what is going on and what their constituents want. Between 79% and 90% of Canadians—the average is 83%—want foods containing genetically modified organisms to be labelled. In the Quebec nation, 86% of people want labelling, and 80% of agricultural producers support implementing mandatory labelling standards. In my youth, there was a saying that went “What the people want, God wants”. I would amend that by saying that what the people want, we, their elected representatives, want. This is what we, their elected representatives, want.

Another very important aspect of labelling is food safety. As a result of globalization—and we have examples—any type of food product can be found on our grocery store shelves and consumers may not know what it contains. For instance, there were cases of toothpaste that contained antifreeze. We must be careful. Therefore, there is also the issue of food safety. Given the lack of information about the medium- and long-term effects of GMOs, it is only natural to have concerns. You surely have concerns about the long-term effects, as I do.

In order to approve a transgenic product, the federal government relies on studies made by companies, which I will not mention, and merely reviews them. It does not conduct a systematic second assessment of all the plants and foods that are put on the market. Consequently, there is very little public or independent expertise in the evaluation of transgenic foods. The approval process must be more accessible and transparent in order to help the public better understand the risks and benefits associated with GMOs.

In March 2004, the government established a voluntary and ambiguous labelling policy.

• (1740)

It is so ambiguous that no foods on our store shelves are labelled to indicate whether or not they contain GMOs. There are none; we can find none. The policy is so confusing, everything is so mixed up that it would be too complicated. If there are no genetically modified organisms in the food, the producer should not have any trouble labelling it. However, the voluntary labelling system is so complicated and confusing that no one even wants to start the process.

In four years, the voluntary labelling program has failed to yield any results. None. In September 2003, after four years of consultations, the Canadian General Standards Board published voluntary labelling rules for products containing GMOs. I will repeat that it was a compromise, a complex and unclear system of labelling, left to the discretion of the industry and, above all, not suited to the needs of consumers.

We have witnessed a part of history in the last couple of years. I would like to talk about José Bové, the Frenchman—as he is called—who spoke out against GMOs. After many battles, Mr. Bové was able to get France to ban all GMOs for human consumption. And so it started.

Mr. Bové served three or four months in prison. He has done it all. He had the nerve to destroy entire crops, but he won. Europe is currently looking at the possibility of banning any food destined for human or animal consumption that contains GMOs—genetically modified organisms.

What I find surprising is that only Canada, the United States and New Zealand have yet to take this position. Why are European countries and other countries throughout the world completely opposed to genetically modified organisms?

One benefit of labelling GMOs is that consumers will have relevant information about the products they are consuming, so that they can make an informed decision, a cultural decision, a personal decision or a religious decision. It is up to agricultural producers to ensure they have access to the markets by complying with the current national and international standards. This would open up the European market to wheat producers.

What is a GMO? All living organisms have a multitude of genes that determine the colour and shape of their fruits and leaves. A GMO is a living organism to which has been added one or more genes to give it a special characteristic. For example—

• (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired. I tried to catch his eye, but he was too immersed in his speech.

The hon. member for Simcoe North has the floor for questions and comments.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's presentation. I fully admit that Canadian consumers are very interested in food labelling and the importance of it as it relates to information that helps them make their choices about food.

Some 50 products have been approved by Health Canada and have gone through rigorous assessments in terms of their health safety. Only when these assessments have been completed will those products go on the market. Why should the member be concerned that these GM products need some additional labelling?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. If I am not mistaken, he attended this

afternoon's meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It was his first time present, and he did well.

It is a bit like hiding one's head in the sand. How can we trust them, if it has been proven by departments and by everyone that the government does not have the means or methods for verification. It trusts the methods of companies like Monsanto, and looks only to see if the tests appear valid. That is crazy. We do not get a second opinion, no second opinion at all. We have to blindly trust the industry. Can we actually trust them?

Remember that the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture said that the enormous pressure was put on him to approve genetically modified products. Even President Bush was pressured to accept GMOs.

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I get very passionate whenever it comes time to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for West Nova for questions and comments.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles is presenting such a bill. Doing so demonstrates the maturity of the Bloc Québécois.

We must recognize that in order to protect Canadians, we need to have a strong, central government. The central government can tell merchants and retailers in the provinces, like Quebec, what must be found on the shelves, what must be displayed to inform citizens. It can go even further and tell them what language and even what words must be used—the specific nomenclature that must be used.

This is a acknowledgement of federalism, a recognition of Canada, and I congratulate him wholeheartedly.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker,—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles must first realize that when the Speaker rises, he must wait.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, my dear friend, I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Then he will have 90 seconds to respond to these comments. Then the axe will fall.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, my dear friend, you just took some of my time.

I would like to respond to my colleague that it is not a question of sovereignty. It is a question of human well-being. Since 2001, Ontario has been calling for labelling. British Columbia and Quebec have also been calling for labelling. It falls under federal jurisdiction, so we must take care of it.

This does not mean that the government is running smoothly. This means that it is not running smoothly. The Conservatives are not doing their job, which is to take care of mandatory labelling.

• (1750)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here today to discuss a private member's bill, Bill C-517, which was recently tabled in the House.

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[English]

Bill C-517 proposes amendments to the Food and Drugs Act in order to require the mandatory labelling of all foods derived from a genetically modified organism or containing an ingredient derived from a genetically modified organism.

First of all, let me remind the House that Health Canada is responsible for ensuring that all foods, including foods derived from genetically modified organisms, are safe prior to entering the Canadian food system.

I would like to point out that this bill provides a narrower definition of genetically modified food than that which already exists under division 28 of the Food and Drugs Act, also referred to as the novel foods regulations.

Under division 28, "genetically modify" includes modifications obtained through the use of more traditional techniques, such as chemical mutagenesis and conventional breeding, as well as those obtained from modern biotechnology.

Health Canada regulates genetically modified foods as novel foods. The Food and Drugs Act and regulations have defined the concept of "novel food" to include those products derived through specific genetic modification.

This concept also encompasses foods that may have undergone a significant change in composition or nutritional value as a result of a manufacturing or packaging process, or any substance that does not have a history of safe use as a food.

The novel foods regulations permit Health Canada to assess the safety of all novel foods, irrespective of the method used for their development prior to their sale in Canada. Only after a novel food is determined safe for human consumption is it allowed to be sold on the Canadian market.

I would like to stress that amendments to the Food and Drugs Act as proposed in Bill C-517 would create a two tier system for genetically modified foods.

Depending on the method used in the development of the specific food, foods falling under the new definition would be required to be labelled to indicate the method of production, while others derived from more traditional modification methods, such as mutagenesis, would not be subject to mandatory labelling.

We have a rigorous process in Canada. Novel foods regulations require that Health Canada be notified prior to the marketing of any novel food in Canada so that a thorough safety assessment can be performed for each product.

The basis of these assessments by Health Canada scientists is a comparison of each novel food with a conventional counterpart and requires a critical evaluation of the scientific information and results of research studies provided in accordance with Health Canada requirements.

The information requirements are comprehensive. Typically, they include a complete description of the food product, its intended use, a molecular characterization of any novel traits, biochemical and compositional analysis, toxicological, nutritional and allergenicity

data, and an estimate of dietary exposure and anticipated use patterns by the average consumer, including population subgroups where applicable.

The requirements are laid out in the Health Canada publication entitled "Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods". These guidelines were recently updated following public consultation.

The guidelines were revised to provide more detailed information about the pre-market notification procedure for novel foods in Canada, to provide more explicit guidance on the safety assessment data requirements for different types of novel foods, and to reflect advances in science and technology.

The revised guidelines are also consistent with guidance documents developed at the international level with respect to the assessment of genetically modified foods.

• (1755)

[Translation]

The Government of Canada believes that protecting the health of humans and of Canada's environment is the primary consideration of the regulatory system.

[English]

As I have mentioned before, only those foods demonstrated to be safe for human consumption are permitted into the market place.

This bill calls on the Minister of Health to maintain a list of all genetically modified foods, publish the list in the *Canada Gazette*, and post it on the Internet so anyone who requests it can see it.

This requirement is unnecessary as Health Canada already publishes a list of approved novel foods and decision documents which describe how regulatory authorities determined the safety of each new product and why certain conclusions were reached. It is all on the website.

Also available on Health Canada's website are decision summaries for each new product, the new novel foods regulations and guidelines, along with fact sheets and answers to frequently asked questions to aid in understanding this subject.

The Government of Canada is committed to sharing information with Canadians on how it regulates products of biotechnology.

In addition, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, have launched a project to post information about products that are under review on the CFIA website.

As part of this notices of submission project, the public is provided with an opportunity to provide input on scientific matters relevant to the safety assessment of submissions from certain product developers who have requested safety assessments of novel foods or plants with novel traits.

Scientific questions or information is forwarded to Health Canada and CFIA evaluators for consideration in the assessment.

[Translation]

The subject of the bill is food labelling.

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[English]

In Canada food labelling policies at the federal level are a shared responsibility of Health Canada and CFIA under the Food and Drugs Act.

Health Canada's responsibilities for food labelling fall within the department's mandate for health and safety issues. With respect to genetically modified foods, as with all foods, Health Canada's role is to identify the information required on the label of that food to ensure safe use.

Health Canada would determine what type of information is needed on the label to inform Canadians about these changes in the food. For example, in cases where the final food product has been intentionally modified in composition, such as increasing the level of a particular acid in canola oil, a different common name will be required to describe the oil.

Special labelling is required if changes occurred in the food that the consumer needs to be informed of for health and safety reasons, such as major compositional or nutritional changes.

[Translation]

Once again, genetically modified foods cannot be sold in Canada unless it has been proven that they are safe to eat.

[English]

Special labelling would not be used in place of a thorough safety assessment.

Apart from safety concerns, there are important trade issues that need to be looked at. Mandatory labelling would be required for genetically modified foods where safety concerns such as allergies and compositional or nutritional changes are identified. The labelling would be required to alert consumers in any case and the statements could not be misleading.

Let me say that mandatory labelling would require that all parts of the production chain participate, regardless of the nature of the products or consumer preferences. This would have major trade implications and costs.

• (1800)

[Translation]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in this House and take part in this extremely important debate. First, I would like to congratulate the two members who spoke before me and added much to the debate. I would also like to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary for Health on the quality of his French, which is steadily improving and which he is using more and more. I do have some concerns, however, about some of what he said.

I agree with him that Health Canada is doing a very good job of making sure that the foods on the Canadian market are safe and meet the highest international scientific standards, even though mistakes can occur. Some will say, however, that even with these assessments, genetically modified organisms can negatively impact Canadians' health, especially because we do not know how they interact with one another in growing children. It will take someone who knows

more about organic biology or organic chemistry than I do to determine who is right.

What we can do is deal with what comes under our responsibility. In that regard, I agree with the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles that if consumers and parents are informed, they can make decisions they deem appropriate, in light of information and instructions they can follow. It is true that we are seeing young people in our schools who are taking an interest in these issues and discussing them.

There are some problems, however. The parliamentary secretary raised some valid points. In Canada, there are already about 50 genetically modified products on the market that have been approved, are in circulation and can be consumed on their own or are used to produce another food. This can present problems when it comes to marketing products and also for parents or consumers, who need to know the level of risk. Solutions to these problems must be found.

I support the member's bill because I agree with its purpose. It may yet be amended, but I believe that the member has to table this kind of bill in the House because of certain things the government has done. Like the member who spoke before me, I was once the parliamentary secretary for health. I had to explain which measures the government took and why the government did not decide to impose labelling. Even so, that is no reason not to consider it in the future.

[English]

That being said, we have to recognize that there are some problems in the food chain. If we say that all products that have genetically modified components in them must be labelled, we would be labelling so much on the shelves of our stores that the labelling would become meaningless. Canola oil is a GMO and it is omnipresent in the production of other foods. In the instance of aquaculture it may be that the entrance part of the feed, being an animal or plant, was partly produced using some GMO that might be one-thousandth of one per cent.

If that is not defined in the regulations, then that can become a problem, in that we could over label or end up not labelling enough. That is not defined in the bill as presented by the member. This is a subject for debate and questions. What is it? Is it a product that is 100% GMO? Is it a product that is at a certain percentage? How do we define that? How do we do it? At the health committee we can hear from experts who perhaps can help us.

This is not the ideal. The ideal would be that we would do this through regulation rather than through a bill, that we would make a minor amendment to the act so that it compels the minister to create the regulations. The regulations can be modified as market conditions or scientific conditions change a lot faster than bringing it back to this House in a bill to modify it. That is a problem.

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I recognize the point of the member that if we do not do it through a private member's bill, we may not do it at all. That is an issue that will have to be debated at the committee to see if there is a way to do it under the current regulations that would meet the desired effects of this bill without creating stand-alone legislation, to do it through the regulatory process.

That would be the wise way for us to proceed. We have huge industrial and agricultural interests in this country and other areas that have an interest in this, that would want to make sure that we do not disadvantage ourselves when it comes to the products that we are competing against in our very own market and in other markets.

Other countries could say that when 50% of the product is manufactured from GMO it has to be labelled as GMO. However, in Canada a product that is 10% GMO would have to be labelled as such. Consumers would see on the same shelf a competing product from another country with 40% GMO not labelled as GMO. We would be producing a product that has less GMOs in it, but it would have a competitive disadvantage because the consumer would believe that it was all GMO and that the other product was not, whereas actually more GMO entrants were included within that competing product from another country. We have to consider the point the parliamentary secretary raised. It is a valid point. We have to consider our trade relationships and where we are in relation to other countries.

Our party has advanced a grown in Canada initiative with four major actions. This would play well within its intent.

We should design regulations under the current Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act to clarify the definitions of "made in Canada", "product of Canada" and create a separate "grown in Canada" label for 100% Canadian grown products.

We should work with farmers and agri-food value chain partners to create a non-profit governing body that would manage and implement a voluntary "grown in Canada" label that would identify 100% Canadian grown products and work with CFIA to establish an audit process to maintain label integrity.

We should establish a grown in Canada marketing fund with two major objectives.

We should provide marketing grants to local farmers' markets and other buy local initiatives in communities across Canada.

We should develop a marketing campaign informing Canadian consumers of Canada's strong record of farm initiatives for environmental sustainability, food safety and others.

We should develop a grown in Canada toolkit, a series of knowledge and development programs where farm and industry organizations work in partnership with the government to develop information and business extension tools.

• (1805)

[Translation]

I could go on about this, but we all understand the problems associated with buying products labelled as made in Canada. These products, food or otherwise, can be made entirely in other countries and just packaged in Canada.

Recently, there were problems with toothpaste and pet food. Labels indicated that the products came from Canada or the United States, markets that people are familiar with and that comply with food safety standards. However, the products inside the packages were from China and did not comply with safety standards. We saw what happened as a result.

It is important to answer all of these questions. My time is up, but there is still a lot to discuss. We will have to continue this discussion in the Standing Committee on Health.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the member on introducing this bill, as well as all of the members who took part in the debate.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with some pleasure that I enter this evening's debate. Obviously this is an issue that the New Democrats hold near and dear to our hearts as the history has been recounted in this place.

[Translation]

Bill C-517 is almost, word for word, the same bill as the one introduced by my colleague for Winnipeg North during the 37th Parliament and then introduced by my colleague for British Columbia Southern Interior in this Parliament. This is a necessary and long overdue bill and I am pleased to support it.

[English]

To recount the history of how this bill has been making its way through this place steadily parliament after parliament, it seems clear to me and to many others that it is a response by politicians representing different parties to a need expressed by Canadians.

• (1810)

This bill attempts to allow people a greater certainty to have as much information as possible on the products they are buying for their families, the food they are consuming. Many people have approached me and I am sure many of my colleagues in this House have been approached as well. People are confused and concerned about what it is they are buying in the stores. They want to know what the chemicals and other ingredients that are listed on the back of products actually are.

Most folks are not organic chemists. Most folks do not spend a great deal of time researching on the Internet each chemical additive to the products they are buying. Certainly there are very few, even those who specialize in organic chemistry, who understand the interaction that occurs when chemicals come together and what it means for the consumer, for the human form and for our environment in general.

When we step into the realm of genetically modified foods and products, we step into an entirely new conversation. This conversation about what the consequences are has not been properly had in this Parliament, in many of our legislatures and in the homes of Canadians. We need to understand the ethical, moral and environmental implications of the genetically modified foods that we consume, the foods that we put on the table for our friends and family, foods that have been modified at the genetic level.

Of course many on the big agriculture side, the Monsantos of the world, will say that foods have been modified for centuries. They will say that they have been trying to make crops grow better under certain conditions by only picking out the wheat that grows best or the cow that produces the most milk and that that is a genetic modification. It is patently false to try to compare those two systems and assume that they are one.

On the one hand we are choosing from the herd the cow that might produce more milk. In this case the genetic modification of food is when a scientist comes along and pulls genes from an organism at the molecular level and replaces them with genes from an entirely different organism. Genes from salmon are being put into genes that are meant to grow corn. Genes from a whole myriad of organisms are being placed into other organisms.

There is a fundamental principle that is absolutely missing from the legislation that governs this country. That is the precautionary principle.

We were very proud last year that a bill that New Democrats put forward to ban a series of dangerous chemicals from products in Canada was debated and modified at the environment committee and passed unanimously in this place and went to the other place. It applied the precautionary principle as its foundation. It said that in the absence of 100% evidence, which is sometimes the excuse I have heard from Health Canada and Environment Canada officials, that we do not have 100% conclusive evidence on a thing and in the overabundance of evidence pointing us in a certain direction there is something to be worried about with a new chemical or product, the precautionary principle says that we must act in a cautious way because otherwise the full testing of that product is taking place with the public in the marketplace. That is not responsible government.

We often have debates in this place about what the real role of government should be, what should government do and what should it not do. In this case, the setting out of the basic rules and principles as to what will be safe and what will be considered unsafe is clearly a role for government, because at the individual consumer level it is impossible.

It is an impossibility to say that rampant individualism will rule the day and people will simply know enough and will have done enough research themselves that they will conduct themselves in a safe manner and will ensure that nothing unsafe will end up on their kitchen tables. It is foolish. Every day in this place we pass security bills, crime bills and environmental legislation that we hope provides the rules and the framework in which industry and individual consumers can guide themselves, can participate in the rules. This place is a referee for what is fair and unfair, what is safe and unsafe.

There is another very important issue, and that is the reversal of the burden of proof. The industry, which profits from genetically modified foods, should be responsible for proving that its products are safe before putting them on the market, and not the government.

However, the onus of responsibility is somehow reliant upon government to prove a thing safe, to run the tests. We know scientists in Health Canada and Environment Canada, and it is not only this administration but with the previous administration as well, have brought forward concerns about genetically modified products. They

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have said that in certain circumstances they have had some scientific concerns. We know a number of things have happened to them, and promotion has not been one of them. They have been terminated. They have been threatened. They have been muzzled.

This goes beyond the ideology of one party or another. This goes to the safety of Canadians and the freedom of science to conduct itself in a rational way, to provide advice and guidance to the government of the day.

We know in recent magazines the government has been noted as a so-called enemy of science, fearful of the science. That was in relation to issues around climate change and the resistance to meet the preponderance of evidence saying the climate science was in and that we needed to conduct ourselves in a different way.

We have never seen this in the history of Parliament, in Westminster tradition, but the government is filibustering a private member's bill at committee, delaying, denying, stalling hour after hour, not letting the democratic will of this place and the country to be expressed.

Is there anything more fundamental than what we do here? It is to allow the free and fair exchange of ideas and debate, to allow the best ideas to come forward and to allow the will of Parliament to be expressed, the will of the voters who put us in this place and to whom we are responsible to conduct ourselves.

What do we see from the government? It simply does not like the bill put forward by the leader of the New Democrats, the member for Toronto—Danforth. Its response to disliking environmental legislation, environmental initiatives like this one, is to filibuster, delay, deny the existence of this and therefore abdicate its responsibility.

This is consistently why New Democrats have found a lack of confidence in the government, an inability to support it in its agenda. It conducts itself in a way that is unsupportable.

We feel that if genetically modified foods are a safe thing, if the government feels it has the science and the evidence on its side to say that this is safe, 100% guaranteed, then the labelling of such products, the identification of those products, should not be a problem. Consumers will then have a choice between a product that has been genetically modified or one that has not. Consumers will vote with their feet, will vote with their dollars and they will choose products that are safer for their families.

I urge all members from all parties to take this bill into consideration, to let their conscience guide them, to support it, allow it to see debate and eventual passage so we finally feel full confidence in the products that appear on our shelves and on our tables.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to speak to this debate on Bill C-517, a private member's bill introduced by the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, which would amend the Food and Drugs Act. The bill primarily deals with foods and food components for human consumption that are or that contain genetically modified elements.

Adjournment Proceedings

As the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles said, this is not the first time that the Bloc Québécois has tabled a similar bill in the House of Commons. On November 4, 1999, Hélène Alarie's Bill C-309 was adopted at first reading. In reading this, I am very surprised to see that in nine years, Parliament has not been able to produce legislation on labelling for GMOs.

Bill C-517 would make the labelling of GMOs mandatory. The new clause 7.3 proposed in the bill provides for a list of genetically modified foods to be made available to the public. The bill also provides for prison sentences and fines for any violators.

In the absence of information about the medium- or long-term impact of GMOs, it is natural to have concerns.

Canada has no standards in place to force mandatory labelling of foods containing GMOs, despite the demands and concerns of many consumers and the recommendations of many studies and reports. The federal government's policy of voluntary labelling remains a fiasco.

In September 2003, after four years of consultations, the Canadian General Standards Board reached a decision regarding the rules for voluntary labelling of products containing GMOs. According to lobby groups following the issue, a final compromise was reached that involved complex, ambiguous labelling left to the discretion of the industries and manufacturers.

On April 15, 2005, on the first anniversary of the implementation of voluntary labelling policies, Greenpeace, the Union des consommateurs, Équiterre and other environmental groups denounced the laxity of the measure, demonstrating that it is still impossible to find foods labelled as containing GMOs. Those groups even based their information on a Health Canada assessment, estimating that nearly 70% of processed products found in grocery stores in Quebec and Canada would contain GMOs.

Once again today, Greenpeace, in partnership with the Bloc Québécois and the Union des consommateurs, came to Parliament Hill to say that the contamination of cultures by GMOs concerns all agricultural producers.

Voluntary labelling standards have failed completely, according to Greenpeace, which also reminded us that 86% of Quebecers are demanding or calling for mandatory labelling. Its consultations with agricultural producers in Quebec confirmed that over 80% of farmers also want mandatory labelling. We can therefore ask when the government will give consumers the right to know if their food products contain GMOs.

Greenpeace and the Union des consommateurs came here to ask the Canadian government to respect and ratify the Cartagena protocol on biosafety.

•(1820)

They are also calling on the government to respect consumers' fundamental rights to know what is in the foods they eat. Some 40 countries around the world have already brought in mandatory labelling. The Union des consommateurs is demanding that research into biotechnology be continued and improved.

Today, at this press conference on GMOs, Canada's dairy producers and Quebec's Union des producteurs agricoles also lent their support. The president, Réal Gauthier, also came to represent the Laurentian and Outaouais dairy producers.

In his speech, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles mentioned that he had two idols in his riding: Claire and Norbert. He happened to mention that he was talking about young people aged 11 or 12. Last year, I had the same experience in my own riding. Two young people, Thomas Drolet and James Cameron, also got involved at school and created an Internet site to inform the community and their classmates about the problem of GMOs. They also came here to the House of Commons to present a petition with over 2,000 names of people who support them and recognize the need for mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.

These young people did their research. They learned about the issues, they did a lot of reading, and they consulted websites about GMO issues. They developed their knowledge of the subject and shared that knowledge through presentations in class. I am very surprised that these primary school children are so interested in health issues at such an important time in their lives, right before they go to secondary school. We should pay close attention to these young people and tell them that we will accede to their request concerning GMOs.

Bill C-517 is a bill that also focuses on future generations and seeks to ensure that they have the right to healthful food and can read the labels to find out exactly what they are about to eat. Twelve year olds can make choices too. The young people at Notre-Dame-de-Saint-Joseph school in La Prairie want to make informed choices. Some people might tell them to consult the government websites that list the 50 products. However, when people are buying products or eating chocolate bars, they need to know what they are eating. If the chocolate bar label says that the product contains modified organisms, young people will be able to freely choose what they want to eat.

Bill C-517 is about the future. It is for future generations, for the young people who are now asking us—urging us—to pass this new bill.

•(1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.