


# 39th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

## EDITED HANSARD • NUMBER 004

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**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

**Thursday, April 6, 2006**

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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The House met at 10 a.m.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):**  

Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your appointment.

[*Translation*]



It is an honour for me to speak to this issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this evening's debate.

[*English*]

This is an issue of vital importance both to those who work in this critically important sector of our economy and to all Canadians. As one of the protest signs on Parliament Hill yesterday stated "farmer's feed cities", so the future of Canadian agriculture is clearly a matter that impacts us all.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, thousands of frustrated farmers gathered on Parliament Hill to tell the members of this House that the status quo that they have been forced to endure for too long is completely unacceptable. I would like to say to them, this evening, that the new Government of Canada agrees with them, and that in the weeks, months and years to come, we will take action to support the Canadian agriculture sector.

  (1820)

[*English*]

Our government cares deeply about agriculture and we have deep insight into the problems farmers face in part because so many of our caucus members are from rural Canada. In my own case, I have family connections to agriculture through both my mother and my wife, both of whom grew up on farms. In fact, members of our family still work in agriculture today.

My government's direction for agricultural policy will be shaped by our members of Parliament, people from rural areas across this country who have been deeply involved in farming for their entire lives. We are stronger because of this representation and frankly, have a better understanding of the difficult times facing many farm families today than the previous government did.

[*Translation*]

In the previous Parliament, almost every agriculture question raised in the House resulted from our efforts as the official opposition. We stood up for Canadian farmers because we are dedicated to maintaining what is best about Canada, our traditions. Nothing is more important than the family farm.

[*English*]

The family farm has been a critical element in the formation of our nation. We cannot really talk about sovereignty as a nation if we do not have a strong role in the production of our food. That is why the government will stand up for a strong, vibrant farm sector that provides security of income to families dependent on farming and food security for all other Canadians.

To this end, one of the first acts of the government was to begin getting the \$750 million promised by the previous government, but never delivered, into the hands of struggling grains and oilseeds farmers.

[*Translation*]

In contrast to the previous government, with its negligence and inaction, Canada's new government has a tangible plan to support Canadian farmers. For example, we will overhaul the current inadequate agricultural income stabilization program and implement a special disaster assistance fund.

[*English*]

Quite simply, the existing CAIS program is not working, a fact that Canadian farmers in every province know very well. That is why the government wants to replace CAISP and urges the provinces to work with us to replace CAISP and introduce a simpler, much more responsive program. The new program should properly address the cost of production, market revenue and inventory evaluation.

We are also going to pitch in when the unexpected strikes by creating a fund for disaster relief assistance over and above income stabilization.

During the recent election we promised to commit at least an additional \$500 million every year to farm support programs, a promise we will carry through on. Let me be clear, this will be new money on top of existing agricultural programs, not reallocation.

[*Translation*]

In addition, this government will stand up for farmers in supply managed sectors. We will ensure that agricultural industries that choose to work within a national supply managed system remain viable.

Our government will continue to support the three pillars of supply management and its objectives—to offer consumers high quality products at good prices with a reasonable return for the producer.

[*English*]

We are also going to address what has long been a sore point for many western grain farmers, not having the freedom to make their own marketing and transportation decisions. The government will empower producers by allowing them to have dual marketing options when it comes to the Wheat Board.

No discussion of agriculture in this country would be complete without the mention of diversification as in the longer run Canadian farmers will have to look for new opportunities. The government is committed to facilitating this necessary diversification. As those who make their living from the land already know, there is a fast growing market for agricultural products in the area of renewable fuel such as ethanol and biodiesel. Our government intends to merge environmental goals with those of agriculture by requiring an average 5% renewable fuel content in Canadian fuel by 2010.

☺ ☺ (1825)

[*Translation*]

Not only will this measure help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it will also protect consumers against the rising cost of fuel. By encouraging the consumption of renewable fuels, we will create new incentives for much-needed investments in Canada's rural regions.

Lastly, my government will work hard to promote Canada's commercial interests internationally. We believe that our entire agricultural sector must be protected, not only by strong international free trade, but also by fair trade practices.

[*English*]

In order to secure free and fair trade, the government will continue to support rules based trading systems like the WTO which we believe are essential to the interests of countries like ours that depend on trade. The future of Canadian agricultural and agri-food products is also dependent on enhanced market access and to that end we will support the phased reduction of all trade distorting barriers and the elimination of all agricultural export subsidies. Simply put, Canada's new government will go to the wall on the issues that matter to our farmers and rural communities.

[*Translation*]

During the last election campaign, we committed to protecting the rights of Canadian communities, both urban and rural. Those in power have ignored the interests of rural communities for too long. Today, I want Canadians to know that the era of neglect ended on January 23.

[*English*]

No longer will the concerns of rural Canada fall on deaf ears. Rural Canadians from coast to coast to coast finally have an ally in Ottawa. I do not say that we can fix the neglect of a decade overnight, and I know that our producers do not expect that, but in the weeks, months and years ahead, our government will move ahead, not with mere words but with actions.

The government, with our agriculture minister leading the charge, will give Canadian farmers the respect that has been denied to them for too long. For the first time in 13 years Ottawa will listen to Canadian farmers and begin to deliver the results they deserve.