

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Who said "No"?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Oral questions. The hon. member for Elgin (Mr. Wise).

Mr. Anguish: A point of privilege, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Questions of privilege are usually heard at the end of the question period. I shall be delighted to hear the hon. member then.

Mr. Anguish: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: That is the same thing.

Mr. Anguish: A point of order.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Would the hon. member please resume his seat.

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: The hon. member will understand that the same ruling applies also to points of order. I shall hear him with pleasure after the question period.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): We won't hear him with pleasure.

Madam Speaker: The hon. member for Elgin.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

AGRICULTURE

REQUEST ACTION BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF FARMERS

Hon. John Wise (Elgin): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to my hon. friend, the Minister of Agriculture. It relates to the subject I raised earlier in my motion under Standing Order 43 regarding high interest rates and its effect on farmers, particularly young farmers.

In the face of declining farm commodity prices—pork, beef and potatoes, to mention a few—and in view of the statement of the Minister of Finance that no new programs will be put into motion without increased government revenues, does this mean that no new programs and no new help, either directly to the producers or in co-operation with the provinces, will be given to help farmers cope with the very serious problem of high interest rates at this time of year?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, we have met with all the provincial ministers of agriculture: my counterparts and myself finished those meetings on the weekend. The suggestions we received from some of them were encouraging, but none of them are rushing ahead with any kind of program other than those we already have. I am sure the hon. member knows, from his past experience, that many provinces have programs of low interest rates for farm start programs, such as that in Saskatchewan at 8 per cent and that in Nova Scotia which is a low interest program.

As the hon. member is well aware, we initiated programs to provide interest-free loans to farmers. For instance, soybean producers have been provided \$15 million in interest-free money from last fall, and it will run until next July. Apple growers have received the same kind of program; rutabaga growers have received the same kind of assistance, and many other producers have as well.

The hon. member mentioned programs for beef producers, pork producers, etc. I met with the Canadian Bankers' Association last night. They told me that there seems to be no lessening of borrowing by these people. Bankruptcies are not what some people are stating; they are not above normal. I have been in constant touch with the minister of agriculture of the province of Ontario, and he has not come forward with any programs similar to what other provinces have for their producers.

● (1420)

Mr. Wise: Madam Speaker, having known the minister for the last seven years, I interpret that answer as being "No".

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wise: During the campaign, the minister made a very clear commitment to give additional funding to the Farm Credit Corporation. Does he intend to keep that commitment, or does he intend to break that commitment? Also, during the campaign he gave a clear commitment to grant additional money for agricultural research. Is that commitment going to be kept, or is it going to be broken?

Mr. Whelan: Madam Speaker, the former minister of agriculture realizes, I am sure, that the commitment to research is not being lessened. There are this year 59 extra man-years for research and several more million dollars. The hon. member also knows full well that when I say we are going to do something, we generally do it unless there are certain circumstances beyond my control. But we are just putting together all the recommendations of provincial ministers of agriculture that have been made to me in the last three weeks for those kinds of programs.

I have asked the farm organizations, also, to tell me how many farmers are in a state of bankruptcy, are not going to plant, etc. A week ago last Tuesday I made that request of the National Farmers' Union. I made the same request of the executive of the Federation of Agriculture, and I have not yet received one reply.