

I would like to ask the member, in his experience, will this legislation that we have before us today achieve its objective if each province has a different agreement and different level of support?

For example, if one province is to get, \$3.38 a bushel for its corn and another one gets \$4.38, a dollar difference in the agreements between provinces, will this work? In your opinion does this reflect the comparative advantage to production? And will this cause a shift to production between provinces in this country?

Mr. Stupich: The National Farm Products Marketing Board allows for some differences in the return to the producers of various commodities on the basis of the difference in the cost of production in different provinces. I think that is a principle that has stood the test of time and that the federal minister would want to include in this program.

Apart from that, the federal government under the Liberals would never allow any topping up—that is, if there was a federal-provincial program in agriculture. If the province was prepared to go one step further because of a particular situation in that province, then the federal government would withdraw its support by the same amount. So it was not possible for a provincial government to top up programs.

I am not using that as a criticism of the Liberals. After all, these things are evolving.

I gather from the legislation before us now—at least from what I have heard and from what I have read, I understand this is the case—that if this particular legislation and this program goes ahead, then the federal government will allow topping up by provincial governments if they are so inclined.

If that is the case, well then I think that is the way it should be.

Mrs. Christine Stewart (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to have the opportunity this afternoon to say a few words to the legislation before us, Bill C-98, the Farm Income Protection Act.

I would like to say from the outset that I am certainly not an expert in farming and agricultural practises here in Canada, as some of my colleagues in the House are. But I have listened to the minister speak to this bill today and I would like to say from the outset that in general I support this legislation that has been presented today.

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But, in particular, what I support is the process that the minister has used to bring about the legislation that we have before us today. I would wish that all of the legislation that we had before this House had the same level of input from all levels in this country—the grassroots, in this case the farm producers, the provincial government, federal officials, and the minister himself.

However, in speaking to the bill it is also, I believe, important for me to say just how concerned I am about the well-being of agriculture in our country, because I believe that it is a sector of our society that we in this House know is crucial to the economy of this country at this point in time. Yet, I believe that Canadian citizens as a whole depreciate the value of agriculture to not only our Canadian economy but to our individual well-being as Canadians.

I do not believe that Canadians understand that they do not really pay the real price of the food they eat, when they go shopping, and when they prepare their meals at home. I do not think they realize how little of the cash they pay at the grocery store counter actually goes into the pockets of our hard-working farmers. I believe that very often—and I see this in my own riding of Northumberland—those hard-working farmers often work in isolation and perhaps are not the best people in the world for joining to lobby together for improved circumstances for themselves.

In my own riding I often have farmers come to me individually, farmers who have worked extremely hard, often to the point of losing their health, but who in the end find themselves in economic circumstances that they simply cannot withstand any longer and are at the point of bankruptcy, which in many cases has resulted in further deterioration of the physical and mental health of our farmers.

Having worked abroad, before I came to this House, in developing nations and having assisted in many programs of agricultural development, I cannot repeat too many times how important I feel it is that we focus and concentrate on the value of agricultural production. I believe that agriculture is a security issue for every country around the world. I think it is a security issue for us here in Canada, but I think it is an issue which is not understood in that context. I feel that day by day, month by month, year by year we are losing our capacity in this country to produce the food that we require for our-