

Government Orders

• (1300)

The funding that is presently available under the existing act should not be held up because we are debating this bill today.

“The Advance Payments for Crops Act is designed to assist producers of storable crops across Canada to market their product in an orderly way”. These are quotes from our own government papers.

“The act provides for interest-free advance payments for storable crops other than wheat, oats, barley grown within the Canadian Wheat Board’s designated area. The program guarantees bank loans to qualified producers, marketing organizations and pays the interest thereon. This allows farmers to store their crops rather than market them at a time when supplies are plentiful and prices depressed. Administrative costs are to be borne by the producer organizations”.

The definition of the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act is as follows: “The government makes interest-free cash advances to farmers for storing certain grains on their farms before delivery to the Canadian Wheat Board. The advance is set according to a prescribed formula and the farmer is responsible for paying off the debt after the grain is delivered. The cash advance program is of importance when grain elevators are full and no storage is available. It has been used in exceptional circumstances, such as the postponement of grain harvesting from fall to spring because of adverse weather conditions, the drying of damp grain or when there are transportation problems”.

I think these descriptions bring up a few of the criteria that I feel are most important and worthy of discussion in this proposed bill. The most important aspect, perhaps, is the elimination of the interest-free provision under the act.

According to the proposed revision there is no advantage whatsoever, as has been said by other colleagues in the House, to farmers having this program. They can just as easily go to a bank and make a loan there at more or less the same rate.

There is definitely no advantage to the agricultural associations which administer these programs. These associations are liable for 10 per cent of the loans made. It costs them funding to administer the program. There will be so few farmers who will benefit from the revised program that the associations themselves are no longer able, under the proposed revisions, to administer the program. They simply will not have sufficient funds to do so.

Many, many groups across this country have expressed their deep concern about the proposals in this bill. In Ontario, where my riding is, we have tobacco growers who represent a group that has received tremendous assistance through this program. Over one-third of the program goes to assist the tobacco and corn producers in our province. But there are nine different commodities in Ontario that are grown and which product benefits the farmers of the areas. These are: flue cured tobacco, corn, soybeans, apples, potatoes, processing tomatoes, honey, oats and barley.

Some 33 different producers in the province took advantage of the program last year which advanced \$87 million and paid \$53.3 million in interest.

I consider farming to be, as I said before, our most vital industry in this country. I consider agriculture or food to be a major security commodity in our world. Our world is changing dramatically. We are very pleased when we look at our world today to see the east-west *détente* that is taking place at the present time. We do not have the same fear that we did some years ago of nuclear war.

We are very interested to listen to the changes daily with regard to the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in Russia, and the opening up of societies in Eastern Europe, but we have to balance this optimistic scenario with the alarming world economic scene in which a few multinational corporations are involved in a growth that is staggering. To quote from a report of the Club of Rome about this: “Every day of continued exponential growth brings the world system closer to the ultimate limits of that growth. A decision to do nothing is a decision to increase the risk of collapse”.

I am alarmed as I see the policies of this government which allow our family farmers to go out of business, which allow multinational corporations to take over the food industry, and which dismantle our supply management programs leaving our farmers much more vulnerable than they were before.