

Speaker; I want to hear for myself and I will continue to do that. I only accept about one-tenth of the invitations I receive from farm organizations and I attend these meetings on Wednesday or Friday night or the weekend. Rarely do I ever miss a day in the House or in my office. The time is not sacrificed from my job or in the House of Commons; it is sacrificed by my family which is probably not proper. I challenge anyone to put their record in the House or their duty as a member of parliament against mine.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whelan: I might say, too, that I use the government plane and that every time I do I will take guests with me. I will take other Canadians with me to see what other parts of Canada are like so they can understand the position of agriculture in relation to the whole nation.

Every three months the Canada Department of Agriculture prepares factual information and outlook material and provides this information to the industry and to farmers. It is impossible to provide completely accurate forecasts in agriculture. For instance, no one forecast what was going to happen to agriculture this year. No one, not the greatest adviser in the United States or in Canada, not one of them told us what was going to happen.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I hope something constructive comes out of this discussion today. As Minister of Agriculture I will be the first one to recognize it and put it into force. All I can say is that from past performance in this place and in the Standing Committee on Agriculture, and I will just use the instance of the little crop insurance bill—

An hon. Member: That is the only bill.

Mr. Whelan: That may be the only bill, Mr. Speaker, but any bill that took longer than that would take two years to get through.

An hon. Member: Try it!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar.

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, the minister has just said that no one could have foreseen what was going to happen to agriculture in the last year or in the last six months. What he is actually saying is that in agriculture we are in a similar situation to that in which we find ourselves with regard to energy, that there has not been a long-term program. As is charged in the motion, agriculture has been dealt with only by short-term programs. The farmer, like the government, was caught flat-footed when trying to deal with a situation without real confidence in the future. Mr. Speaker, we need confidence if we are going to discharge our responsibilities to the people of Canada.

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) can go about the country saying that we have cheap food if he wishes but he has not convinced the consumer of that. He has not even convinced his own colleagues because the government has set up a Food Prices Review Board to find out what is wrong with the cost of food in this country. The minister says that he is to meet tomorrow with the beef producers. I hope he also meets with other people involved

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in the industry. I hope he is going to do a thorough job so he can come back to the House with a policy for the red meat industry that will bring some confidence to it. In my province, the provincial government had to pay a price support for hogs to ensure the maintenance of a decent level of hog production. That is a role that the Federal government should be fulfilling. The government ever since the second world war has had the responsibility for an agricultural prices support program.

● (1550)

Let me return to beef. What is the government's record? I say that its record is shabby and unco-ordinated. Unilaterally it took off the tariff on beef coming into Canada. It did not obtain any assurances in exchange for removing the tariff. It just took it off unilaterally. People in the cattle producing business said the government was wrong. We said it was wrong, but that made no difference. Next we witnessed an embargo which the Minister of Agriculture said was not an embargo. Everybody else understood that it was an embargo but he said it was not. If it was not an embargo, why did he impose it? Whom was he kidding? Whom was he fooling? His actions only contributed to the confusion of the industry. Later he reinstated the three cent tariff. Apparently he also got rid of the embargo.

Let me tell the minister that the western producers want to know what the government's real policy is. They have seen beef prices fall from \$60 a hundred to \$44. That is quite a spread. There is no significant support price. The minister says that he cannot get appropriate legislation through the House. I say that if he were to bring legislation before the House that would provide up to date support prices, it would receive passage. The price support legislation on the statute books is hopelessly out of date. The support price based on 80 per cent of the average price in the previous ten years is useless considering the present rate of inflation of 4 to 5 per cent per year. You do not need to be a mathematician with a slide rule to figure out that a support price based on that kind of theory will not be anywhere near the actual prices in effect. In view of this lack of policy and lack of realistic support prices, agricultural producers are wondering where they are to go from here.

The Minister of Agriculture is also responsible for making sure that Canadian consumers have available adequate supplies of food at reasonable prices which will return to the farmer at least his cost of production. Notwithstanding this responsibility, one year ago we imported 27 million pounds of butter. I wonder how many million pounds we will import this year. I wonder how many pounds of New Zealand lamb we will import, assuming New Zealanders have the lamb and want to send it to this country. I wonder if the government will reinstate a support price for wool that will encourage wool production in Canada, assure a stable market for wool and make sure that we do not pay through the nose for the wool that is necessary for the suits and other clothes we wear every day. When will the government do that?

The minister can stand up and tell us what a wonderful job the government is doing through the Farm Credit Corporation. Any developed country, such as Canada, that does not have a properly working agricultural credit pro-