

Supply

moments they would like to take a plot of land, a field and put it in fallow for a year and give it a rest.

For the minister to take this 2 per cent figure having to do with summer fallow acreage and turn it into a confidence factor is absurd. It fits in with my comments related to his. His remarks, in my opinion, have an air of unreality about them.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. I want to make a comment and ask a question of the hon. member.

The minister spoke in his speech in glowing terms of how much this Conservative government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I suggest that the hon. member concentrate on the speech made by the hon. member for Winnipeg—St. James since it is his speech that he is commenting on.

Mr. Laporte: In the past members of the government have made many comments—and this was referred in the hon. member's speech—to the effect that the government has made a major contribution to agriculture in this country and in fact that it has supported agriculture and that agriculture is doing very well. I would just like to throw in a couple of figures here, if I could, and I will focus on Saskatchewan.

From the time that this Conservative government came into power in 1984 the level of farm debt in Saskatchewan rose from about \$4 billion to almost \$6 billion. Today, the level of farm debt in Saskatchewan is over \$6 billion. One-third of the farmers carry 70 per cent of that debt.

As well, since 1984, since this government took power, foreclosures have tripled in Saskatchewan. This year farmers are faced with something like 10,000 foreclosures in Saskatchewan.

Contrary to what the government is saying and contrary to what has been said today, I do not see where the farmers of Saskatchewan are doing so well. I would just like to ask the hon. member if he knows of anywhere in the province of Manitoba, or anywhere else in this country, where the farmers are doing well and where rural Canada is doing well.

Surely, based on what the minister is saying, there has to be some areas in this country where farming is doing

very well. I would like to know where that is. Does the hon. member have any idea of where that might be?

Mr. Harvard: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that an uncle of my wife who lives in the Humboldt, Saskatchewan area feels—

Mr. Friesen: That's heavy research.

Mr. Harvard: That is heavy research. I do not want the hon. member from British Columbia to trivialize my remarks because farmers know what they are talking about. There is an old expression from where I came that goes this way: You didn't come down the river on a bale of hay. I know a lot of farmers and most farmers did not come down the river on a bale of hay. They know their business and they know it well.

What I was going to say about my wife's uncle who lives near Humboldt, Saskatchewan, is that he feels that he is one of the lucky ones. He is a man probably near 70 years of age. He is up there with some other people in this hallowed Chamber. He is lucky because he has been on the farm a long time and is not heavily in debt. In fact, I suspect that he does not have any debt at all. He is in the sunset years of his farming experience.

• (1650)

But what about the young people? What about the young men and women who would like to take up a life on the farm and they are in their early twenties? What do they face?

I do not think I have to tell my good friend from Moose Jaw—Lake Centre the proposition that they face. It is almost impossible, what with the cost of land, the cost of machinery, the cost of loans and these low commodity prices. As I said earlier, when you take inflation into account, these prices are lower than those that prevailed in the 1930s.

It is true that you can find happy stories. You can find successful stories. They are here and they are there. I am happy for that. I am delighted. I wish every Canadian farmer would show a profit. I wish every Canadian farmer could take a vacation two or three weeks every year and feel that he could afford it. But those farmers are few and far between.

The reason I say that is because all we have to do is look at the indicators, look at the statistics. The information is absolutely overwhelming. The farm story is a disturbing one—farmers are in a terrible dilemma. The