

*Prairie Farm Assistance Act*

whatever type of structure upon which he decided, to have the power to receive the moneys which might be derived from the checkoff of funds. These could be added to the funds which are available from the prairie farm emergency fund.

I see that my time is almost up and I know there are other speakers who wish to make a contribution to this debate. I do look forward to the minister's comments and the motion which I understand he will propose at the close of his remarks.

**Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak on Bill C-245. I thank the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) for putting this bill before the House.

For almost a century now agricultural research has been supporting commercial agriculture and related industries in Canada. Initially, Canadian agriculture was faced with the challenge of farming in virgin territory, with limited resources. Early research focused on that fact. It did a good job of providing the kind of information which was necessary to provide the pioneers with the cultural success necessary to grow crops under those circumstances.

It is necessary that the knowledge about how crops can be grown be disseminated to farmers. Agriculture Canada has built up a research capacity as well as an educational distribution system. This has worked very well. It did not always get the information out, but it has worked very well compared to many other systems. There is no doubt about the need for research. I support the bill in its main approach because of this requirement. I support the idea of immediately making arrangements to put the prairie farm emergency fund into use for research rather than letting it remain in its present position as part of an account of the Government of Canada.

There is no doubt about a continuing need for increased funding for research. Development into cereals and oil seed production is an area which requires extra funds.

In several recent agricultural conferences in the west and in Ottawa during the last few years a great deal of time and consideration has been given to the increase in our export level of grains and of oil seeds to a suggested level of 30 million tonnes. To do that, it is necessary to increase not only the amount of land in production but also to increase production from each area of land. A great portion of this increased production, which would require about a 4 per cent increase in production per year, when at present we are only increasing at the rate of approximately 2 per cent a year, could be achieved through research if it is used in the right way.

● (1720)

We have committed our farmers to a great increase in production. The increase would be based on the increase in fertilizer, weed control, reduction of summer fallow, improvement in varieties, better moisture control, snow control, and expansion of irrigation areas. All of this can be increased by providing more knowledge to the farmers about their land and how to increase production on it. If the research is not carried out and the information given to the farmers, there is very

little chance of reaching the potential sales levels indicated by the Canadian Wheat Board and other agencies.

There is no doubt that there are potential sales if we can raise the grain. As we know, our trade deficit would be much greater without the sale of grains and oil seeds from western Canada. For the well-being of our economy it is necessary to recognize the need for research and increased production in the west in those areas.

The hon. member for Moose Jaw presented one method by which these funds could be used. I commend him on his initiative in this direction. I agree with his basic approach, but only to the extent that it suggests one method of getting government funds into research. Several farm organizations have also agreed, but some have expressed concern that the hon. member's approach would set up one more administrative structure to administer a particular amount of money, without the kind of co-ordination which should be available for research in this area.

As a westerner I share the hon. member's concern that research into cereal grains and oil seeds for use in the prairie region should be expanded. The commitment of funds to another foundation will further fragment the public approach to research and development and allow the government to withdraw easily from yet another area of publicly funded research. This is a real danger in this area.

Research budgets in the Department of Agriculture have decreased in real terms. Increases have run at about 10 per cent annually. The director general of the western research branch says that 10 per cent does not keep face with inflation. They also say there have been necessary staff cuts each year because of that lack of increase. Researchers in the west have indicated that they need an increase of between 50 per cent and 70 per cent in research funds for equipment, travel, energy, and manpower.

On many occasions this government has indicated that it is striving mightily to increase production of western agriculture. However, this lack of funds in the research area does not indicate that much concern. The research component of getting to 30 million tonnes in export levels has been ignored to some extent. Ministers do not put their money where their mouths are.

There are some dangers in this area as well if we follow the hon. member's approach. The new prairie cereal and oil seed research and development trust would possibly overlap with present public programs by funding private, competing research. This may be another case of public funds—I know the hon. member indicated that these funds belonged to the farmers, but they are public funds—going to private ventures for the benefit of the private sector first, in plant development, and for the benefit of the public and producer second.

We face a number of problems in our transportation system because the function of that system is not an instrument of public policy. We have demanded that the CNR and CPR be integrated and publicly controlled in order to provide better service to the people of Canada. Rail transportation is a mess