

Livestock Feed Assistance Act

● (2140)

In fact we had more agricultural production at one time in the north than we have today. All one has to do is look at some of these communities and their truck farming, or gardening, and it will be obvious that the long days obviously lend themselves to the production of fresh vegetables in the area. All one has to do is go into the stores and look at the prices. Obviously there are advantages, yet I do not believe as I stand that this government here has caught that vision at all. Members in the government see the north rather as an area where, through regulations, they control its development and the people who live there.

I share the views of the hon. member for Wetaskiwin in supporting this legislation which will include farmers in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, but I do not think it addresses a fundamental principle which this House should address. It does not address the regional advantage that should and does exist, for instance, in the production of livestock and feed grain. This should not be eroded, and there should be no reciprocal action with other industries being placed in those areas which have lost their regional advantage through federal legislation.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of the feed grain assistance proposal before us, not because I think it will make any great change in the life of the people in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, nor because I think it is an important breakthrough, but simply because it puts people in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon in a similar position to farmers in the rest of Canada. For reasons of equality we support this bill, though we are very much aware that the proposal will not make any great change in the agricultural output of the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

This is not because there is not potential there, because there is. As has been mentioned, the area has in the past produced its own food for a population of somewhere between 25,000 and 40,000 people. The main impediment to the development of agriculture in the Yukon and Northwest Territories now is not so much the lack of feed grain assistance, the provision of which I contend will make virtually no difference to the development effort there. In fact this may be of some detriment to those producers who are attempting to produce oats and barley now. However, it will provide some back-up for them in the event that frost wipes out their crops. They will know that assistance from the rest of Canada is available and they can bring in feed if they have been developing their livestock industry, making use of locally grown feeds.

Probably the main impediment to the development of agriculture in the territories is the lack of speed that has been evident in the settlement of land claims in that part of the country. The original peoples and the Government of Canada have been taking part in long drawn out negotiations. If agriculture is to become important enough to provide food, making the area more or less self-sufficient, that is the first thing that has to be solved. I am not suggesting that the

settlements should be other than fair, but there should perhaps be a little more effort made in negotiating these land claims in order to settle them so everyone knows who will be holding the agricultural land, or the land that has agricultural potential.

We know that land which once grew crops is growing up with trees. We know the climate is adequate for the growth of a large variety of vegetables, many varieties of oats and barley, and a number of forage crops, including several types of hay and alfalfa. These things can be grown in that part of the north and could be used to assist in the development of the local economy.

There are a lot of problems in establishing agriculture in any new area. I myself am only two or three generations away from the development of what was once a heavily timbered part of Saskatchewan. I know the problems the farmers of the Yukon and Northwest Territories will be facing are not the kinds of problems faced by farmers in those areas where agriculture has been developed.

Mr. Nielsen: Have you ever been there?

Mr. Althouse: No, but I know from looking at the geological soil maps and the climatic conditions that it is not much different from where I am located, where there is about a ten-day greater frost-free period, with the rest of the conditions, including soil and climate, being very similar. There is a little more sunlight, but otherwise the possibilities are there, given some changes in the question of who owns the land and who has the right to develop it.

Mr. Nielsen: Be my guest and come up this summer.

Mr. Althouse: Okay, will do. I think one of the things we perhaps pay too much attention to in agriculture is the development of what we try to call viable farms as opposed to subsistence farms. Perhaps we have been spending too much of our efforts in agricultural policy in this country in the past 40 or 50 years dealing with the farms and the areas, and not enough in dealing with the farmer. We have seen areas developed after a couple of generations that were supposed to be areas of subsistence farming. We find that rather than an area being suitable for subsistence production, a class of farmer has learned to use the land and the resources to very good advantage. Perhaps what we should be considering, instead of classing certain areas, writing them off as areas where only subsistence farming can take place, is the development of all the resources, thinking particularly of the farmer.

Farmers have a number of special requirements when they go into new areas. Many of these things they take with them. Most people who move into that type of agriculture take with them a great amount of initiative and an ability to adapt. They know how to make things grow out of nothing. They spend a lot of their time clearing and developing the land, putting up buildings and adapting equipment. Very often the general equipment available for farming does not work well in new areas where you have to tear down the trees, tear up the land and make it suitable for crop production.