

permitted offshore imports to come into Canada in substantial quantities. Actually, about 186 million pounds of it came in in 1976 from Australia and New Zealand in the face of the highest ever domestic production of our own beef. If you do not think that caused consternation and grave hardship in our domestic cattle industry, Mr. Speaker, then all I can say is that you are not aware of the facts of cow life, if you like, especially in western Canada. That situation more than any other single factor prevented the beef cattle cycle from turning around at least one year earlier. The upturn that finally came early this year in the turnaround in beef prices, and all cattle prices, I am sure would have come at least a year earlier had it not been for that one situation in which the Government of Canada permitted unrestricted imports of offshore beef for nine months in 1976. We should never forget about that.

In addition to that, the hon. member spoke about desert regions encroaching on good farm land. I must say I took special interest in that comment; it reminded me of a situation very close to my own home. Whether I like it or not, I am a product of ten years of drought in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan which took place in the 1930's. I was only 13 years old when it started and I lived through the whole ten years of it. I know what drought has done in western Canada, although most people nowadays are not aware of, and do not seem to be interested in, what can happen when our climate plays tricks on us and we get into a prolonged drought.

I want to remind the hon. member that we had a grim taste of that ten-year drought period last year. I spoke about it many times in the House but I felt I was not taken very seriously. All of last year, beginning with the previous winter, we had a situation which was in every respect as serious as the three worst years in the 1930s, 1931, 1932 and 1937. With respect to soil moisture, the year 1977 was as serious as any of those three years in the 1930s. With respect to surface water, on our cattle ranges especially but anywhere as far as that goes, whether on cultivated land in the form of a prairie slough, dams, dugouts, streams and even sources of water in dug wells, the situation was worse for farmers than at any time in the 1930s.

This was unusual in that since the 1930s we have had millions of dollars worth of really good conservation projects developed on the prairies through the PFRA. That agency has done a tremendous job in that respect. I say this not because I am implying that that combination of geography, the chinook winds and the dry climate, is the result of a political decision in any way, but when we politicians think that we can interfere and distort or change—thinking we are going to do some good—patterns in which nature has a bigger hand, we should be exceedingly careful before taking on such an undertaking.

I think that in agriculture especially we have not learned the lessons we should have learned from the drought times of the 1930s and from the single bad drought year last year. I think we should reflect on that before we forget about it. Perhaps

### *Food Aid*

also it is fair to say that more damage was done over the years in agriculture by too much political involvement or intervention rather than too little. We should keep that in mind, especially when we start long range planning.

● (1632)

I should like to refer to a program which exists in the cattle industry. Canadian cattle producers should be commended for their new Beef Watch Program. This program was financed by the cattlemen; there is not a nickel's worth of government money in that program. It is financed by check-offs. Most of the check-off money which finances this program comes from Alberta and Ontario, with some from British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The biggest portion comes from where most of our cattle are, Alberta and Ontario. Anyone who will take the trouble to read the reports of this program will be carefully advised. Hopefully the provincial and federal governments, as well as the cattlemen, will read these reports. A concise report is given twice a year in the months of November and May. It started only last fall, but will continue every year. It will assist both producers and governments in understanding the beef cycle as well as the total cattle industry. We would do well to study that report. So far the Beef Watch Program is only in its infancy. The two reports which have been issued are exceedingly good. I sent copies of those reports to every member of the House.

As I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to take part in this debate, but I am pleased to have made this contribution.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss Aileen Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply and Services):** Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of millions of starving people in the world, according to the estimates of the United Nations. It is clear that hon. members on both sides of the House are equally agreed that we have a heavy moral responsibility to provide aid to those less fortunate than ourselves. It seems to me that a highly desirable way to exercise that responsibility is to make every effort to assist these countries in becoming self-sufficient in food production.

Rural development generally, and development of the agriculture sector specifically, are of vital importance to the future of the less developed countries of the world. Since 1970, Canadian food aid to the third world has risen by more than 19 per cent every year, to approximately \$225 million in fiscal year 1975-76. This \$225 million is about one-quarter of all CIDA disbursements for the fiscal year. The initial figures for fiscal year 1977-78 show more than \$230 million in food aid.

Canada's food aid program has now been operating for more than 25 years and has provided the world's hungry countries with food valued at approximately \$1.7 billion. Obviously we must continue to respond to these needs; but as I said before, we must also help these countries become self-sufficient. The