

Supply

We are also looking at policies that will ensure farmers' production decisions are driven, not by government programs but by market signals. This does not mean that farmers have to live without support against sudden changes in markets or weather. Indeed, we need effective support programs to act as cushions against the unexpected and the unpredictable.

Our policies will also ensure that farmers continue to have the right to market their products in a collective fashion. Through the policy review, we want to ensure that the benefits of supply management continue. At the same time, we want to ensure our agri-food industry is responsive to what the market wants and needs. We want all facets of the industry working together to ensure market opportunities are not lost or ignored.

As my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture has said many times, "We are taking this review right from the farmers' gate to the consumers' plate".

This government recognizes that all segments have a role to play in ensuring our agri-food industry grows and expands to its true potential. Certainly, this government's commitment to the industry cannot be questioned. We have always been there in times of need and, through the policy review, we are taking steps to ensure the agri-food industry remains vital and strong. That is a goal I am sure everyone in this House shares and supports.

When I review the motion currently before us, it seemingly comes at us from a non-partisan point of view. It was with that thought in mind that I initially looked at this motion, but after having heard the speeches I began to have my doubts.

The motion in a very honest and sincere way calls upon the Government of Canada to endeavour to strengthen the economic position of Canadian producers with an immediate cash injection, with or without provincial participation.

While I understand where the author of the motion is coming from, it leaves a whole roomful of questions to be answered. The questions and answers do not seem to go together. For instance, if this money is to be made available, to whom will it be available? Will it be made available on a cultivated basis, a crop basis, will it include pasture land, will it consider special crops grown, or will

a program, in whatever form it might take, be designed to compensate those that have run through a particularly bad period of years in relationship to those that have run through a period of fairly successful years? Is there any provision at all in such a program, whatever it might be, that deals with the capability of the particular acre of land being considered?

While on the surface it seems like a very easy motion to address, we have found in experience that in order to be fair and equitable to all those concerned, the answer to the very elusive question of how best to resolve the cash flow problems in agriculture remains elusive. It remains elusive, not only from those of us in the House of Commons that have permit books—and I think there are more of us on the government side than on the opposition side—it continues to remain a problem for government as well.

The opposition is long on rhetoric, long on desire, but short on suggestions.

Hon. Ralph Ferguson (Lambton—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this debate today.

• (1730)

I commend my colleague from Winnipeg—St. James for the very eloquent and understanding speech he made in this debate. His well researched presentation was certainly a credit to one from western Canada who, while he is not an agriculturalist, he certainly understands the problems of those producers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. My colleague has outlined that very eloquently. I want to go a little step further and deviate from the problem in western Canada, although it is very serious. My heart goes out to those producers, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who are losing their farms and their lifetime savings. Because many of these people are in their late fifties and early sixties, a life of retirement that is free of worry and want is not available to them.

I want to deviate for a moment or two and draw the attention of the government to the fact that we also have problems in Ontario at this point. We have been waiting anxiously for the announcement of the initial payments for Ontario winter wheat. The beginning of harvest for this crop is less than eight weeks away. These farmers have to make a very important decision, a decision