

Supply

We have a serious situation. I am glad that this kind of a motion is before us. I am happy that we have had this kind of debate. I just hope that we can come to grips with this situation as soon as possible.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his remarks. We know this member has a tremendous amount of experience in the area of communications.

Speaking as one urban member of Parliament, we quite often sit in this House and listen to these debates on agricultural matters and are naturally not as knowledgeable as many of our members who have rural ridings. I also believe that many of our constituents in urban areas are not as familiar with the complexities that surround this issue.

For example, when I listened to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board this morning, he talked about the tremendous subsidies that the European countries were giving to their farmers and said they were virtually holding our farmers in this country hostage. They were creating a situation where even with all the cash assistance that hopefully this government will be advancing soon, it still does not correct the problem in the long term.

I was wondering, as I was listening to the minister for the Wheat Board this morning and my hon. colleague just recently, if it would be more effective for us as a country to have these meetings debating agricultural subsidies not just with the bureaucrats and the politicians. Somehow we should communicate to the communities at large, not only in Europe, but also in our country, just exactly what is going on in terms of subsidies.

I know how effective the Greenpeace campaign was in terms of the baby seals. There are many other examples in terms of the rain forest.

I wonder if the hon. member could react to what his views would be in terms of communicating these problems to major urban markets, not only here but also in Europe.

Mr. Harvard: Mr. Speaker, I think that my hon. colleague has made a very good suggestion. I think we have to communicate better on this issue. This is not just a farm issue. It is an urban issue. It is a national issue. The farmers feed all of us. They feed themselves and they feed the people who live in the urban areas of the country. In fact, this is really a food security issue. That is how important it is. We are not just talking about saving

a few farmers. We are talking about the very security of the country.

I have said this before and I will say it again. If a country, be it Canada or any other country in the world, cannot feed itself, if it does not have a stable agricultural community, if it does not have farmers who can make ends meet, that country is in terrible shape. If the farm community goes down, the rest of the country will not be far behind.

I think that my hon. colleague from Toronto is absolutely right. We do have to come together on this issue because we are all involved in it.

• (1530)

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, the contributions of farmers and the agri-food industry is this nation's lifeline. We just heard a minute ago how important the food industry is to any person in this world. It is very clear in Ethiopia how important food is. It is very clear in the Soviet Union how important the food and agricultural industry are. It is important to the European Community because it suffered 40 years ago with no food. It must be important to all Canadians.

The Canadian food industry as well as the farm community in this country today is in jeopardy. All Canadians must share a common goal of making certain that the farm community is raised to much better status than it is presently. I believe that the people in government, the people in the opposition, can all agree to that tenet. We must agree to that and we must work toward that today—not tomorrow, not in the future sometime, but today.

In my riding of Essex—Kent we have a very, very bad situation in the agricultural community. In the last four years poor weather has caused disaster in the agricultural community. I have seen plants leave my riding. Nabisco is one good example of a plant that was very productive and had to leave; Hunt-Wesson, another one that was very, very important in producing canned goods; Olinda, which is on the verge of being brought back. We are talking about hundreds of workers being laid off in factories in my riding, hundreds of farmers losing contracts, and certainly a disaster in the drought right now.

A lot of people would say "well, the farm community is protected a bit by crop insurance". Well, let me tell you and tell the people of Canada that crop insurance is based on the average of the last five years production. In my riding it happens to be that we have had disastrous weather conditions in four of those five years—drought, floods, drought, hail, all things which the farm community could not control, and yet things that have caused the