

Soil Erosion

about the southern part of Saskatchewan where, as my friend said, the problems are particularly bad.

In both Alberta and Saskatchewan erosion by wind is a pervasive problem. Farmers in all areas of the Prairies are interested in conservation tillage, extended cropping, and residue management as tools to cope with erosion, salinity, loss of organic matter, and declining soil fertility.

With PFRA assistance these groups enable farmers to confront degradation issues in a number of ways; through local meetings, tours and visits to other regions of the Prairies, co-operative use of specialized machinery, and on-farm demonstrations. That same type of co-operation is used in other parts of Canada as well.

The farmers and PFRA share a common purpose—to maintain a healthy land resource and a sustainable agricultural industry. These are also the objectives contained in a recent federal-provincial strategy on agriculture approved by the First Ministers of Canada. A key element of that strategy and future federal-provincial soil and water accords is a reliance on a partnership between governments and farmers. Our Government, in consultation with provincial prairie governments, is actively seeking ways to expand our present efforts into a long-term bulwark against soil degradation.

In Ontario, as I said a moment ago, the Soil and Water Environmental Enhancement Program, commonly known as SWEEP, is a \$30 million federal-provincial agreement designed to improve soil and water quality in southwestern Ontario over the next five years. The financing is being provided by Agriculture Canada through an ERDA subsidiary agreement. Environment Canada is involved with monitoring the activities on selected watersheds. ERDA subsidiary agreements on agricultural development with the Provinces of British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have resource conservation elements.

• (1430)

Agriculture Canada's Research Branch continues to place a high priority on soil conservation research. In a time of shrinking budgets, this is one area where the current effort will be sustained and increased. I hope my friend, the Member for Davenport, is listening because that is one area in which I disagree with him. The fact is that Agriculture Canada is indeed well aware of the subject and is putting money toward the development of the transfer of technologies, which is an integral part of most of the ERDA subagreements.

These activities show that the Government is responding to the threat of soil erosion across the nation. However, I agree with my hon. friend that more effort is needed and we must continue to increase resources aimed at solving erosion problems.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) for bringing this subject before the House as a

Private Member's Motion. The Hon. Member who just spoke suggests that all is in hand and there is no urgency to give much more attention to this question of soil conservation. I believe that suggestion was far too apologetic and unaware of the difficulties facing many farmers individually, and farming throughout the country.

The excellent report of the Senate Committee stressed this problem via a number of statistics that I believe we should not forget when addressing this urgent question. For instance, in southwestern Ontario the erosion problem has caused a loss of corn yields of some 30 per cent to 40 per cent. It is very difficult for my farmers in Essex County, farmers in Kent County, and farmers elsewhere in southwestern Ontario to cope with those losses.

The 1982 estimates were that the prairie farmer would have had to pay \$239 million in fertilizer costs to fully recover the present loss in grain production from wind and water erosion. The report suggests that it is more difficult to put a dollar figure on the equally serious matter of the permanent loss of rich agricultural land to urban use. This point was raised incidentally by the Member who just spoke but is, in fact, a very serious part of the soil erosion reality in this country. The expansion of our cities without taking into account the importance of maintaining fertile parts of our farmland can be devastating.

This report found that between 1961 and 1976, Canada lost 3.5 million acres of farmland, an area equivalent to the Province of Prince Edward Island. This question requires urgent attention.

The concern that farmers feel about this problem became evident recently during a farm forum that we held in my constituency for a wide range of farm groups from across Essex County. One of those who testified to the New Democratic Members of Parliament who made up that Farm Forum was the President of the Essex Soil and Crop Improvement Association. That association has more than 350 members from Essex County. It aims to promote and encourage good soil and crop management practices.

Although there are people in the country who are attempting to respond to the concern, they definitely need a sense of leadership and attention from the Government. The directors of this particular soil and crop improvement association made a number of points. First, they told us that the abundance of grain crops in the world and the declining returns on much of the land may provide an opportunity to remove some less productive land. They would encourage government incentive programs for the diversion of poorer class and less productive soils from grain crops to conservation crops, such as legumes, or tree cover.

They also suggested that this must be tied to the question of price, which has been a serious problem in Essex County. Price constraints have forced them to try to enhance their output by using pesticides and fertilizers which have had the effect of