

Western Grain Stabilization Act

standing in the crossfire, it is very small comfort to know that when you are shot, it is really someone else that they wanted to shoot, but you are still shot. That is in fact what happened to Canadian agriculture. It has received a severe blow from those subsidy wars. I hope that a solution is found to that in the near future so that Canadian farmers, particularly grain farmers, can start receiving income which is more reasonable than what they have been subjected to over recent years, particularly, I might add, last year.

This year there have been other problems, with the drought and everything else. All those situations combined have caused many Canadians to pause and to reflect on the necessity of supporting our agriculture.

I received a number of interesting phone calls, some from my constituents right here in eastern Canada. They contacted me a few weeks ago and asked the following: "We see our brothers and sisters in western Canada affected by this drought. What can we do to help as easterners?" I thought that was fascinating. It demonstrated an element of goodwill from constituents and from citizens outside my constituency but nevertheless around the general area that I represent in the House of Commons, and I was glad to see that kind of a reaction.

I indicated to them the plans that the Government had and the fact that opposition Members in the House were encouraging the Government to go even further in assisting our agricultural sector and that we would continue to do that and, as Members of the House, we would give every assistance to the Government to ensure that help was forthcoming to that sector of Canadian life, mainly western Canadian agriculture. I was glad, and I thought that I would take a moment to express that, in order to see the reaction of some of the people that I represent. I think that it is a very healthy sign when we see our citizens paying for a long-distance phone call to contact Members of Parliament to express their wish to help fellow citizens who live 2,000 or 3,000 miles away from them. That, for me, was very heart-warming. It is far better to see that than some of the divisions which we have experienced from time to time in Canada.

That being said, I want to give my support to this Bill and hope that the House will pass it very shortly. I think that after we pass this Bill we may find time to deal with another agricultural issue if the Parliamentary Secretary wishes to seek our consent for it. I will let him address that later.

Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take a few moments at third reading to describe the amendments to the Western Grain Stabilization Act, which I think all Members of the House know has been a very, very important part of the income support program in western Canada.

● (1200)

I might note in passing that there are a variety of support programs. Eastern Canadian producers are able to participate

in the agriculture stabilization program, but at recent meetings which took place in Toronto and which I had an opportunity to attend with the federal Minister and his provincial counterparts, there was increased interest in the possibility of creating some sort of national stabilization program. Some talks are being held along that line, but in the meantime it is extremely important to the agricultural well-being of western Canada that the Western Grain Stabilization Act be as effective as it possibly can be. These amendments are designed to achieve that, and I appreciate the supportive sentiments of the Hon. Member who just spoke.

This legislation is part of a long-range program. I guess all of us in this House are conscious of the fact that we must respond to the crisis of the moment in an ad hoc fashion, but I think we all believe that the ideal solutions are long-term solutions, and this legislation is part of that umbrella which has played an important role these last three or four years.

As you will recall, in his meeting with farm leaders last December, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) announced that some changes to this Act would be proposed as part of a comprehensive agricultural policy to assist producers in financial need primarily as a result of the trade war which has been going on between the European Community and the U.S. Unfortunately, we are very much victims of that war.

Some of the things we have done have been very important. I would refer just in passing to the Special Grains Program No. 2 which of course injected \$1.1 billion into the hands of all grain producers. Then there were fuel tax rebates and other programs. However, the legislation before us today addresses what has probably become the most important income support program available to western Canadian producers. During the course of this last year alone the participants received some \$1.4 billion. That was of tremendous benefit to the 135,000 western Canadian farmers who are part of the program.

However, we are concerned about the fact that not all farmers chose to participate, for a variety of reasons. Certainly a number of farmers disliked the program when it was originally created, some for philosophical reasons, some because they feared it would not be productive to join. Now that we are in a situation where a lot of the income support made available to western farmers is provided by this program we are troubled by the fact that an estimated 15 per cent of western farmers are not participants. These amendments are designed to encourage a significant percentage of that group to join and benefit.

As a result, the 10 per cent penalty for rejoining has been removed. The deadline for participation in the 1987-88 crop year will be extended so non-participants can rejoin. More crops are being covered. I think that is appropriate because western agriculture is becoming more diversified and a number of crops such as mixed grain, sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, buckwheat, peas, lentils, faba beans and canaryseeds, to name just a few, have been added. Payments for rejoining and conditional participants has been increased.