

Agriculture

of food production for the nation. That is no way to guarantee ample supplies of good food to consumers.

Agriculture is the most important industry in all of Canada. It is also one of the most complex. There are many different types of products. There are many different types of markets for the same product. And there are many different regions, each with different production problems. When one considers our climatic conditions from coast to coast it does not take much imagination to understand what I am saying. It is obvious that no one-track policy will do a proper job for our agricultural industry and for our farmers. You cannot do the job with one single stroke of the pen when you have ten provincial departments of agriculture with ten different agricultural policies for farmers.

I am going to spell out our policy as simply as I can so that all hon. members will understand our national policy and see that there is a co-ordinated national farm policy.

First, Mr. Speaker, we have policies and programs to assist in the adjustment and development of effective family farms. The Farm Credit Corporation provides the money so farmers can invest to develop profitable family farms. The Farm Credit Corporation has been so successful that it has become the No. 1 source of long-term credit for farmers in Canada. We have kept the interest rate on Farm Credit Corporation loans at 7 per cent. The Farm Credit Corporation has been so successful that people do not look anywhere else for credit but go to their FCC credit adviser first. Only then, if they cannot get the money there, do they go somewhere else.

The small farm development program was planned by the federal government, and today is operating in every province except Newfoundland. This program has been tailor-made to fit the different circumstances in each province, and we have federal-provincial agreements and federal-provincial co-operation. We have had that this year, or since November 27, 1972, when I became minister. I have recognized what I know is real, true co-operation, and so far as I am concerned we have had it from most of the provinces.

● (1540)

The amount of loans made by the Farm Credit Corporation in the last four months—and this is the trend in agriculture and I hope it continues—shows that young people now have more confidence in agriculture than they have had for a long time because 40 per cent of the loans have been made to farmers under 26 years of age. The small farm development program helps family farms to develop to the reasonable profit point and it helps other farmers now trapped on their small farms to retire with dignity or to get a better paying job. Nobody is forced out of business. Only those farmers who want to quit or want to retire get help. That is what the program is for, so that they can retire in dignity or get a change of occupation.

Through the Department of Regional Economic Expansion the government has also provided help through programs such as community pastures, reforestation, and substantial help to set up processing and marketing companies in rural areas. The results are plain to see in areas where this has taken place. Production increases locally to supply the new industries.

[Mr. Whelan.]

The second grouping of policies and programs helps agriculture and farmers to meet unusual market situations and heads off pressures that would disrupt the industry by forcing farmers and entire regions into bankruptcy. The main policies and programs that fall under this heading are those connected with the Agricultural Stabilization Board, the Agricultural Products Board and our national marketing legislation. The Agricultural Stabilization Board offers farmers price stability. The Agricultural Products Board offers market stability by handling temporary surpluses. Furthermore, we have taken the leadership and have invited the provinces to develop jointly even better price and income stabilization programs. We did this in September and it had never been done before. The provincial ministers of agriculture were impressed. The minister from Ontario, who has been longest in office, said that he had never attended a meeting that had given him the impression the federal government was really concerned about doing something about agriculture. I might say, Mr. Speaker, that they all agreed with our philosophy on what should be done to stabilize agriculture in Canada.

Marketing legislation provides help for co-operatives so that they can, for example, pay farmers an initial price. This is the first time in the history of my department that there has been a special group to work with farm co-operatives. Marketing legislation has been provided so farmers can set up national marketing agencies. Crucial market information is provided by the department through regular reports such as the weekly livestock report, the daily potato report, the weekly fruit and vegetable report and so on. This government has provided leadership and money to help agriculture and farmers to find and sell to new and larger markets both inside Canada and abroad by providing a \$10 million fund.

The third broad grouping of programs and policies covers our efforts to help agriculture and farmers expand markets and improve marketing. I have already mentioned the national marketing legislation and some of our market development work. But one of the most important things this government does to promote markets is to set up and run some of the world's best grading, inspection, health and sanitary programs and policies. Because of this government's policies and programs and the dedicated work of the staff of the Canada Department of Agriculture, we have the healthiest livestock in the world, we have the highest quality products in the world, and we have access to more markets than any other nation in the world. And we do not stand pat on our record but are continually improving our standards and our performance. This government provides agriculture and farmers with market information on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis.

The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) mentioned the monitoring of feed grain prices and I am sure someone else will refer to it later. I was in western Canada for four days last week and I talked to many farmers there. No matter what the hon. member for Crowfoot or anybody else says, I think it is my duty to talk to farmers and to listen to them. After every meeting I have with them there is a question period and I listen to what they think the Canada Department of Agriculture should do and what they think the government of Canada should do. I just cannot take what members of the opposition tell me, Mr.