

Supply

• (1640)

What did this motion that was passed 41 to 0 in the Saskatchewan legislature state? I guess there is a preponderance of Conservatives in that House.

The motion states:

— this assembly condemns the Government of Canada for failing to provide adequate assistance to Saskatchewan farmers at a time when a sharp drop in the initial price will mean a loss of \$500 million to \$600 million to Saskatchewan farmers. And, further that this assembly calls on the Government of Canada to provide an immediate direct federal cash payment of \$500 million to Saskatchewan farmers, as advocated again by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool on May 2, 1990, and to implement a sound long term farm income stabilization plan.

In conclusion, the time now is for action and not for rhetoric. That is what the farmers are demanding. It is the least that they deserve.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, there are many things I could take issue with, but I will pick just three.

Farmers are people. To the extent that that means they are consumers, they are going to pay the GST. When I was talking—and I hope no one misunderstood me—I was talking about farmers as businessmen. That is what I meant when I said that a farmer is a businessman and at the end of the day is not going to be paying the GST. I assumed that that would have been obvious, but apparently it was not.

Second, I would like to give some figures with respect to what has been happening with FCC, and they will give more of a picture. Of all the land that FCC owns, it has leased back about 55 per cent of it, and about 95 per cent of that land has been leased back to the original borrower. If we put it in that kind of a context, over half the people who have had financial difficulties with FCC have ended up, through the Farm Debt Review Board system, leasing that same land back. So all those people are not put off the land.

If we look at the number of hearings that have been held, hearings of the Farm Debt Review Board where FCC has been involved, we see that there have been 6,000 hearings. Some 73 per cent of the farmers in all those cases have continued farming. So there is a little bit of a success story there. Again, I am not painting it as

all being rosy, but to get up and say that the FCC owns all this land and by implication the people who did own it no longer farm is not the case.

The last point I would make has to do with the hon. member saying that the decrease in summer fallow is not a good sign. In this business if you do not sow, you do not reap. That is what it is all about. Summer fallow means just that. You fallow it for the summer; you do not seed. I do not see how anybody with some common sense can take a decrease in summer fallow acres as anything but a positive sign. It costs less to look after an acre of summer fallow for a year than it does to crop. It means that farmers are exhibiting a little bit of confidence in the industry because they are seeding more this year than they did last year.

I could go on. There is pretty good evidence around that in some areas summer fallow adds to salinity as far as farm land is concerned. There has been some pretty good work done at the University of Saskatchewan on this subject. It is an indication to me as a farmer, and someone with some common sense, that when summer fallow acreage goes down that is a positive sign for the industry. As I said, if you do not sow in this business you do not reap. What it is all about is producing something so that you can harvest it.

Mr. Harvard: Mr. Speaker, I really think there are more important matters to be talking about than summer fallow acreage.

Let me just try this once again because I think the hon. minister did not hear me very well, or that he misunderstood me.

First, he was the one who mentioned this figure of a 2 per cent reduction in summer fallow acreage. I think it would be reasonable to suggest that 2 per cent is probably within a margin of error. Two per cent is not a lot. I find it astonishing for him to suggest that by taking a small figure of 2 per cent it implies confidence in the agricultural community. At best, it may say nothing at all.

I would also suggest, and this by way of repetition, that my experience on a farm suggests that when farmers feel under pressure they will sometimes take land out of fallow that they perhaps originally did not intend to. They do it because they are going to use every available piece of soil to make a buck, even when in their ideal