

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

remaining of moneys contributed by the western grain producers under that 1 per cent levy. In other words, it is producers' money; it is not taxpayers' money. I emphasize that, Mr. Speaker, it is not taxpayers' money. That money has been in the account since August, 1972, and has not drawn one cent of interest. If one uses the modest interest rate of 8 per cent, and if interest had been paid on that amount, the fund today would total some \$16,781,528, but possibly a more realistic rate would be 9 per cent if averaged from 1972 until the present time. If interest had been paid on the fund at a rate of 9 per cent since August, 1972, today it would total \$18,066,505. In other words, the western grain producers have lost some \$7 to \$9 million in interest on that account.

There is a great need today for research and development in all fields of endeavour, and agriculture is no exception. If we are to increase our production to meet the target of 30 million tonnes of grain as western farm organizations and the Wheat Board predict, in order to meet the demand for food in the world in the future, it is essential that we carry out an intensive program of research and development for cereal grains and oil seeds.

While Agriculture Canada does an excellent job in research and development, over the years it has spread itself very, very thin. Its funds are limited. I believe it is generally accepted in western Canada and, indeed, throughout all of Canada, that there is a need for funds specifically earmarked for research and development of cereal crops and oil seeds suitable for cultivation in western Canada.

If one examines the estimates for 1979-81 it is interesting to note that the Government of Canada, or Agriculture Canada, pays about \$1.3 million to universities and other scientific organizations for research and development. At current rates, interest on the \$9 million-odd in this emergency fund would about equal that \$1.3 million.

It is with the need for funds for research and development in mind that I propose the bill we are debating today. The bill provides, first of all, for the repeal of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. Second, it provides for the setting up of a prairie cereal and oil seed research and development trust. Third, it provides for the transfer of the \$9,066,972 to the trust for investment. As I said earlier, that fund would generate well over \$1 million in interest at today's rates. Fourth, it provides for the use of the interest on this fund for research and development on cereal grains and oil seeds suitable for production in the western prairie region.

The bill further provides for four trustees. Three of those trustees would be elected by the producers of western Canada who are listed as producers in the permit books, and they would be elected at the same time as the advisory board members of the Canadian Wheat Board. These trustees would have to be producers named in a permit book, and each of the three trustees would have to come from each of the prairie provinces.

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These three trustees would name a fourth man who would be chairman of the trust. He would be an expert in the field of research and development in cereal and oil seeds. The trustees would hold office for a period of four years and they would determine what use would be made of the interest earned on the \$9 million-odd. They would decide whether the money should go to a university or to individuals doing research in the area to which I have referred. Of course these trustees would be empowered to accept gifts or bequests from individuals or organizations to add to the capital of the fund.

This bill has received good press in all of western Canada. As well, the bill has been circulated to all the various farm organizations, local pool organizations, local UGG organizations and local elevator agents. I was most pleased with the support I have received for my bill. I have received many letters, and copies of them were turned over to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) for his consideration.

I might add that on October 30 last, a few days after the bill was printed, I wrote to the minister, sent him a copy of the bill, and solicited his support. I have had several conversations with the minister and I continue to hope that he will give speedy passage to the bill. He told me that he supported the concept of using these monies for research and development. He did, however, have some doubts as to my proposed method of dealing with the fund as set out in the bill. The minister was good enough to advise me earlier today that he would be proposing a motion this afternoon which, while it will not result in my bill becoming law, will open the matter to public discussion and input. Presumably it will result in a government bill some time in the future.

I do point out the urgency of the matter, however. At present day interest rates, interest accrues at the rate of some \$3,000 a day on this fund, and that is money lost daily to research and development. I urge the minister to talk to the cabinet about this matter and try to persuade his cabinet colleagues to start paying interest on the money in this fund because that money is producers' money. Interest certainly could be paid on that fund at the same rate at which the Government of Canada pays interest on dominion government bonds. By following that course, when the trust is set up money would then be available immediately for the trustees who can decide to pay out funds which will get the whole process of research and development in motion.

I might say that since proposing my bill I have learned there is a move afoot by some farm organizations in western Canada to press for a check-off on the sale of grain deliveries for the purpose of research and development. This idea was proposed several years ago. It did, however, require a vote, which did not pass at that time. Undoubtedly any move for a check-off now or in the future would require a vote. I would suggest that such a vote could not be held for at least a year.

I would urge the minister after due consideration by the committee and by him, rather than waiting for a decision on any check-off, or a vote on any check-off, that he bring in a bill which would make provision for the board of trustees, or