

Agriculture

producing Canada's food. Perhaps his cabinet colleagues, who no doubt have told him to go and save money, will know how to help him out of this ridiculous position.

All in all the farmers of this country who once had considerable respect for the Minister of Agriculture, whether or not they agreed with his policies, are wondering what has happened to agricultural policy at the federal level, and so are their provincial governments. The present high interest rates policy, operating in the food production sector where there is no excessive demand to be curtailed, is feeding inflation in this most vital of all spending areas—food. The stabilization program designed to bring order into the fluctuations of price, which can cripple production, is being used as a clumsy tool of unrelated government ambitions while the industry it was designed to serve is being denied the full legislated benefits of the stabilization program.

It is time for the government to get its house in order in fulfilling its responsibilities to the agricultural sector of the Canadian economy. It is time for legislation to bring the Farm Credit Corporation and the stabilization programs up to what is needed to meet present realities, and it is time to ensure that farm financing is protected from insane interest rates.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time this week that opposition parties have given us an opportunity to debate agriculture policy. I welcome their interest and concern, but I would welcome it even more if I felt they had expressed the same interest and concern in assisting us to move legislation through the House, particularly some of the agricultural bills which have been ready for some time.

It is difficult to understand why the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) would use this day to debate agriculture, since we have already used one day this week. He knows full well that there is an agriculture bill before the Standing Committee on Agriculture. That committee of the House of Commons should be dealing at this very moment with that bill and possibly finishing with it. I realize the hon. member does not have a high opinion of what that piece of legislation is capable of doing, and I know it has some shortcomings, but it is a bill which the agricultural community has requested for a long, long time. It should be given speedy passage in the House.

As I said the other day, we are talking about agriculture probably instead of acting. Some of the things which have been said in the House are not accurate. Hon. members opposite have talked about me not being well-informed. When we talk about beef subsidization, we use the calendar year, for example, from January 1 to the end of December, 1980. The facts are available to anyone. The formula used by the stabilization board shows no payment for that year. We are using 90 per cent of the average of the last five years, which is statutory, and we must use current input costs. It shows no payment for that particular calendar year.

● (1610)

The big thrust that beef producers felt, as far as extra costs are concerned, especially in interest rates, was from the first of January, and maybe a short part of December, into the first four months of this year. That is where they really felt it and it really hurt, plus the fact that that is when the cattle from the U.S. came in here and depressed the market from 10 cents to 15 cents a pound, live weight. This would have destroyed, as I said the other day, anything that I may have been giving in subsidized interest rates, etc. However, that is what the Canadian Cattlemen's Association wants. They want a free movement of live cattle back and forth across the border. They have lambasted me for saying that we should have some kind of controls on that type of thing. The hon. member for Huron-Bruce (Mr. Cardiff) who just spoke said that I did not know what was going on. I certainly do know what is going on when cattle can move in, say, to the province of Ontario and take over 24 per cent of the slaughter market week in and week out. That is the system which the Canadian Cattlemen's Association has advocated for a long, long time. When I interfered with that, and when I put quotas on live cattle coming into Canada, who objected and wrote to all my cabinet colleagues, and said, "Do not let the Minister of Agriculture do that"? The Canadian Cattlemen's Association wrote every one of them at that time. I do not pretend to be a messiah, or anything.

Mr. Kilgour: Just a socialist!

Mr. Whelan: I do not pretend to be as smart as the hon. fellow who is making the noise over there. He would not know how to feed a sow or cow or how to take care of them in any fashion or form, either, as far as that goes.

Mr. Kilgour: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. That is a completely incorrect statement, Mr. Speaker. I happen to be in the cattle business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hon. Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan).

Mr. Whelan: Yes, I can imagine how the hon. member is in the cattle business. I can imagine for what reason.

However, I just want to say that the cattlemen have asked for the kind of a system they have, and they are the ones who are suffering the consequences. It is not of my doing, because the Americans did not even fill one third of the quota we gave them; but they retaliated on veal, they retaliated on pork and in other fashions. This is what I am saying, when we say that the trade system does not work the way it should.

Mr. Kilgour: Gene, you don't know what you are talking about!

Mr. Whelan: The free market system does not work at all, and it had a depressing effect on cattle, which it should not have had.

Mr. Kilgour: Socialize it, Gene!