

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

and remove from its benefits those who purchased land during the time when it was eligible for prairie farm assistance. It is not sound agricultural practice to have a section such as this, and that is the greatest fault to be found with it. All it says is that with regard to certain crown land, that land will not be under prairie farm assistance.

The next thing wrong with this amendment is that while certain land is removed from the act, in certain instances that land may be highly productive. I know of such parcels of land. It is not right that farmers should have paid one per cent year after year for prairie farm assistance and then be denied all benefits under the act. An amendment such as this must be discouraging to provincial governments that have been endeavouring to follow a sound land use program.

For example, the Saskatchewan government owns over 6 million acres, of which some ten per cent or a little over 600,000 acres has been leased for cultivation purposes. In other words, the department of agriculture of Saskatchewan has been most careful to lease for cultivation purposes only land that is suitable for grain growing. I do not think it is right that farmers who have purchased land from a municipality or the provincial government should be discriminated against by this amendment, when people who purchased land or who are leasing land from mortgage companies, railway companies or the Hudson's Bay Company are still eligible under the act.

I have a land use survey which was made in 1941 by the dominion Department of Agriculture. It shows that in 56 rural municipalities in south-central Saskatchewan at the time the survey was made there were 159,000 acres owned by the Hudson's Bay Company, some 23,000 acres owned by the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National, and 480,000 acres owned by mortgage companies. The minister is saying that any man who purchased land from a mortgage company or the Hudson's Bay Company, no matter if it is just sand, it will be eligible for prairie farm assistance if he cultivates that land. The same would apply if he leases that land.

For the life of me I cannot see any reason for this amendment. The minister says he wants to make a check, but the act has been in force for some ten years, and the proper economic and soil surveys have been made and all the information as to submarginal land is available. As I said, I expressed these same opinions in the committee, but I just wanted to emphasize them and say that while other things done under the act are advantageous, I am opposed to the first clause.

The hon. member for Souris mentioned what might be done under the act to help the people who have been flooded out in the Red river valley. I am afraid that even though the board switched from wheat to coarse grains in determining the yield for the purpose of deciding whether benefits would be paid, it would not result in any different decision from that which would apply if wheat alone were taken as the basis.

Mr. Ross (Souris): I agree with the hon. member.

Mr. Argue: The maximum for wheat is eight bushels to the acre, and, according to the regulations, the maximum for oats and barley is twelve bushels to the acre. In other words, a farmer must have a yield of less than twelve bushels to the acre of oats or barley if he is to get any benefits under this act. But if one farmer out of a hundred is able to seed part of his land, he may get a yield of 100 bushels to the acre of oats, sixty-five bushels to the acre of barley or forty bushels to the acre of wheat, while all the rest of the farmers in the township would have no crops because they could not seed or had seeded so late that the yield would be suitable only for feed purposes.

Mr. Ross (Souris): That happened along the Souris last year.

Mr. Argue: I imagine the hon. member is better acquainted with the details of that situation than I am, and it probably will happen again up there. I do not think it will make any difference to the farmers concerned. If these people are not able to seed, they should be brought under the act, even though an exception be made. They have paid a good deal into the fund under the act, and now when they are faced with adversity some exceptions should be made to bring them within its provisions.

Mr. Gardiner: There is no necessity of making any exception, because the provision is already in the act. Oats and barley could be brought in if the board decided that that was the proper thing to do, if these people have seeded this year. If these people have not been able to seed because of water, they will go on summer fallowing. If there is any wheat in the district I am sure that they would much rather take wheat as the basis than substitute something else. You do not need any amendments to bring them under the act, because the administration has always been on that basis.

Mr. Argue: If there were a hundred acres of wheat, that would be the yardstick and the production there might be forty bushels to the acre.