

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, I have a brief supplementary question for the minister. Can the minister tell the House if it is true that the F-18 is now up to two years behind schedule on the critical milestone for production go-ahead, and that it is now planned that the United States Defence Systems Acquisitions Review Council will not give that clearance until some time in the spring of 1982?

[Translation]

Mr. Lamontagne: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of any delays in the manufacture or delivery of the F-18 aircraft. I want to assure the hon. member that I will personally go to the United States at an early date to check it out. I repeat once again that the Minister of Supply and Services has spent three days there and that our information is that everything is going according to schedule. Whatever the circumstances, we have a contract which is quite firm and the terms and conditions will be met.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

DROUGHT IN WEST—ASSISTANCE IN CREDIT SITUATION OF FARMERS

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. There are measures, we believe, which would be available to the government to lessen the impact of the drought on prairie farmers.

Farmers have been approaching me because the banks are threatening foreclosure action. Furthermore, farmers are saying it would alleviate their situation somewhat if currently insured crops could be written off now and used for green feed. Could the minister please inform the House of the plans he might have for alleviating the drought-stricken farmers' credit situation, and whether the minister could discuss with provincial officials some leniency with regard to crop write-offs?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is aware that the provinces administer crop insurance under the crop insurance agreements we have with them. Producers and farmers pay half the premiums and the federal government pays the other half of the premium, which this year will cost us about \$90 million. The reinsurance program, if the weather stays the way it has been, can cost the federal government in total well over \$500 million in payments to farmers.

Some of the crop insurance people at present are making the kinds of arrangements to which the hon. member has referred, evaluating the crops and letting the farmers harvest them for green feed, which we think is the proper thing to do. That kind of product can be salvaged to be used later in the year or it can be used at present.

I want to add the following to what the minister of agriculture from Manitoba has said in proposing to us a green feed program which he is going to institute and in which he wants

us to participate. I think it is a very good program under which farmers will be paid \$15 an acre to seed. I hope there will be enough moisture so that they can harvest more green feed in the areas of need. Some of the suggestions have been very good and positive, in my view, with a view to maintaining the livestock industry in that area.

With regard to interest rates, so far as we have anything to do with the Farm Credit Corporation we have said there should be no demand for payment from those farmers who are hit in a hard way.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Whelan: Madam Speaker, members of the official opposition have decided not to ask me any questions on drought today, so I am happy that the hon. member has done so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK—AVAILABILITY OF FEED HAY

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of the Environment. I am receiving daily representations by way of resolutions, telephone calls and telegrams from western constituents. This week, for example, the northern district of the Union of Manitoba Municipalities passed a resolution requesting that the federal government permit farmers to enter the Riding National Park to secure the feed hay which is available in the park.

Considering the fact that farmers have been previously able to do this, and notwithstanding the minister's response in the House yesterday but recognizing the emergency situation, I should like to ask the Minister of the Environment to tell the House what plans he has to open up the parks, and will he consider the fact that farmers need to be allowed haying operations to help sustain cattle herds within Manitoba and Saskatchewan?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, as I indicated to the House yesterday, I have no such plan at present. In response to questions, I indicated that to do so would be clearly contrary to long-established national parks' policy.

I did indicate that if members on the far side of the House could provide me with more information on the situation than I have so far received, I would be happy to explore the question again. But up to the present time I must reiterate what I said in the House yesterday, that is, that there are no present plans to follow the course of action which the hon. member recommends.