

*Crop Insurance Act*

an outbreak of grasshoppers in isolated areas. We cannot expect any assistance from the federal government in this regard. As a result of these two facts and the predicted drought this year, we are facing potentially one of the worst years in decades.

● (1620)

This government should move now to ensure that the PFAA remains constituted in such a way that if we are hit with an over-all disaster this year, there will be some relief forthcoming. This may require amendments in respect of crop insurance. In southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta, in what is known as the Palliser triangle, we have no grain left to move. This is mainly the result of the Lift program. I know the Minister of Agriculture does not like that program which encouraged the farmers not to produce. We appreciate that fact and hope the minister will make sure that such a program is not attempted again.

The PFAA now has an emergency fund of over \$15 million which could be used as a catalyst in setting up an over-all emergency program in the event that we in fact face the kind of year that is predicted for western producers. They are an optimistic lot and are still looking forward to some rain in the month of April. In spite of that, the producers on the Prairies face the real possibility of a drought this year as well as an outbreak of grasshoppers. In addition, the world situation lends itself to the belief that we will have a food shortage on a worldwide basis. If we are serious about keeping producer incomes at reasonable levels to ensure that they stay in business we must follow the lead, in respect of crop insurance, provided by the kind of amendments adopted by the government of Saskatchewan under its minister of agriculture, Mr. Messer. Those amendments represent substantial changes and have resulted in a greater number of farmers taking out crop insurance.

We need an over-all disaster plan or insurance fund in order to meet the situation should we be hit with a disaster this year; and this is a potential danger. I am sure the minister has difficulty in obtaining additional funds from Treasury Board, but there is an emergency fund in existence now under PFAA. Perhaps he could use this fact to persuade Treasury Board to give him more money for the establishment of an emergency fund for the assistance of producers in this country. I am sure that if the minister followed this suggestion he would go into the annals of this country as having done something very real for the western producers.

As the hon. member for Assiniboia, I would be more than willing to give the minister at least part of the credit: I would not take it all. If he followed this suggestion, I am sure he would be invited to attend the farm forum again next year—he attended this year—and could then give an excellent speech on the creation of the disaster fund. I seriously urge the minister to consider crop insurance in that context and the concept of a disaster fund.

Crop insurance is one mechanism used in creating adequate incomes for the producers. Crop insurance is selling well this year in Saskatchewan, particularly in my area. I suggest this is the result of the substantial changes made by the Saskatchewan government. However, there are

[Mr. Knight.]

other problems relating to farm income in respect of which change is required, and the change I have suggested should be initiated by the federal government.

I want to be positive about these matters. As an indication of that desire I compliment the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) for the increase in funds to build larger dug-outs under PFRA. This was a very good move and indicates what can be done when the minister is willing to listen and accept suggestions of members of the opposition.

**An hon. Member:** Now, we need water to fill them.

**Mr. Knight:** Yes, we now need water to fill them. If the minister can accomplish that for us, we will be indebted to him. I compliment the minister for listening to that suggestion and making the necessary change. Let me also compliment the Minister of Agriculture for his announced changes in respect of the grassland incentive program. I spoke with at least a dozen young people after the last election who informed me they will be taking advantage of this increase in funds. They are interested in diversifying their operations by going into cattle production. I do not like to take all the credit, but I think I should take some as a result of the increase in funds under PFAA for dug-outs and the increase in respect of grassland incentives.

Let me point out some very serious problems in respect of grasslands. I hope Air Canada does not mind that I used my boarding pass for making notes of what a producer told me during my trip to Ottawa. He pointed out that in order to stabilize farm income, producers were diversifying their operations. Many of them are beginning to raise cattle. In this regard I must point out that farmers are facing serious problems in respect of community pastures. The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion and the Minister of Agriculture must take this fact into consideration in relation to stabilizing the income of western producers.

As an example of the situation I would point out that 1,200 head of cattle were turned away from the community pasture land around Mount Hope, in the Semans district, because of lack of space. I hope the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) does not mind my using figures in respect of his area: I know he is concerned about the community pasture situation around Nokomis, where 1,100 head were turned away. This area is very good cattle producing country. However, it is not nearly as good as the country in my area of Saskatchewan. If 1,200 head have been turned away from pasture land at Mount Hope and 1,100 head at Nokomis, I suggest that is peanuts in comparison with the number of cattle that will be turned away from community pasture land in the southern part of the province. This is becoming a very serious problem and the government should move under PFRA to increase the funds to be used for the purchase of additional community pasture land.

Let me give the House an example of what I have in mind. A large ranch in the Carlyle district recently went bankrupt. It had been financed by the Industrial Development Bank which is operated under the auspices of this government: it does not do much for small or medium size businesses but it did finance this large operation which