

provide greater support and assistance to the agri-food industry at less cost to the taxpayer. I expect to be issuing at least one discussion paper on agricultural issues to help focus these consultations.

The Speech from the Throne underlined the need for a sustained, co-operative and national effort to achieve Canada's economic potential. In this regard, I am fully committed to working with all of my provincial counterparts on ways to overcome problems facing the agri-food sector.

One of my first priorities after being sworn in as Minister of Agriculture was to begin rebuilding constructive working relationships with the provinces on agricultural matters. I have met individually with most of my provincial colleagues as well as meeting with them as a group. We have had fruitful discussions about our mutual concerns and about how to work in greater harmony in the best interests of agricultural producers.

Without a doubt, the problem of farm financing is the biggest obstacle facing the agriculture sector today. Interest payments now constitute the largest single expense for the majority of Canadian farmers. And, unfortunately, a significant number of farmers are having difficulty making those payments.

Last week, I met with provincial Ministers of Agriculture to discuss what can and must be done to meet the unique and serious credit problems in Canadian agriculture. I will soon be seeking the support of my Cabinet colleagues for measures to alleviate some of those problems.

In the meantime, I have instructed the Farm Credit Corporation to suspend loan foreclosures until early next year.

Another top priority which I have been discussing with my provincial counterparts is the establishment of a voluntary stabilization plan for red meat producers. This program would involve contributions by the federal and provincial governments as well as producers. It will require amendments to the Agricultural Stabilization Act. I hope to place those amendments before the House in the very near future.

Another urgent piece of agricultural legislation has already been introduced. The proposed amendment to the national Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act will permit tobacco growers to explore the possibility of forming a national tobacco marketing agency. This amendment has been requested by tobacco growers who have recently suffered from higher input costs, lower prices and declining markets and decreased acreage.

Members of this House will also be asked to consider legislation this session to increase the maximum level of payments under the Advance Payments for Crops Act. This change will bring advance payments for commodities covered by this legislation into line with the cash advances that are available for grain production in western Canada.

The Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board (Mr. Mayer) and I announced last week that prairie grain farmers will receive a final payment of \$123 million under the Western Grain Stabilization Plan for 1983-84. The cheques will be in

*The Address—Mr. Wise*

the mail next week. Considering the smaller grain harvest that resulted from this summer's drought in many parts of the West, it appears likely that a significant pay-out will be triggered under the Western Grain Stabilization Plan in 1984-85 as well. A further amendment to the Western Grain Stabilization Act will be necessary if we want to make an interim payment to producers rather than have them wait until next November to receive another payment.

There will be minor changes to some of our regulatory Acts, as well, but I believe I have outlined the major agricultural legislation and some of the problems that we will be considering over the next few weeks and months.

This Government understands the diversity and importance of the agriculture and food industry. We will work with members of the industry and with the provinces to stimulate and strengthen agriculture's contribution to the Canadian economy.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Is the Hon. Member for Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands (Mr. Manly) rising to ask a question?

**Mr. Manly:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for his speech. I am concerned about his position as head of the Department of Agriculture. The Minister of State for Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) reports to him but he does not have a separate department. During the election campaign, the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) recognized in a major way the importance of the forest industry. In a speech on July 20 the present Prime Minister told the Canadian Club in Vancouver:

A Progressive Conservative government will launch a massive co-operative effort to save this vital element of our national heritage and national economy.

To date we have seen absolutely no evidence of any such massive program in forestry. There is practically no mention of forestry whatsoever in the Throne Speech.

In the last few weeks, a five-year \$300 million fifty-fifty forestry agreement was negotiated between the federal government and the provincial government. I understand the provincial government has now accepted that, but the federal Government is now stalling. According to an October 29 press release, the Minister of State for Forestry said that the funding level could change. He said that a lot would hinge on how much we could afford to flow through in the first year. During the election campaign, the Government recognized the growing deficit in our forest supply. This deficit is very important. Now it is only concerned about the financial deficit, while the deficit in timber supply threatens Canada's economy in coming years. Something has to be done about it, and the Government is not acting.

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How long will Canada's number one industry, forestry, remain a poor cousin of the Department of Agriculture? Will the Minister ensure that while it is under his jurisdiction there will be adequate funds so that agreements such as the federal-provincial agreement in British Columbia and in other provinces can go ahead and not be starved for funding?