

*Supply—Agriculture*

**Mr. Harris:** No, Mr. Chairman. As I have said this is probably, and I certainly hope it will be, the last item with respect to buckets.

Item agreed to.

557. Prairie Farm Assistance Act administration—further amount required, \$416,674.

**Mr. McCullough (Moose Mountain):** Mr. Chairman, I am quite interested in this item; and while I do not wish to cast any reflections on the minister, who has been very considerate in answering questions this afternoon, I do think perhaps it would be much better if we had the Minister of Agriculture with us on this item. I am quite interested in this matter, coming as I do from Saskatchewan where we have had a disastrous crop failure this year. On coming to my desk this morning I found that on Tuesday, March 8, an order in council was passed concerning a regulation with respect to the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. This item is an increase in expenditure on this account. I should like to ask the minister for a clarification of this order in council. It is a section added to the regulations which in effect, I believe, excludes certain farmers from being eligible for P.F.A.A. payments.

In former debates I have indicated to the government that there has been a considerable amount of complaint coming from my constituency with regard to P.F.A.A. payments. While the Minister of Agriculture the other day in the house gave me the assurance that farmers who are not satisfied may appeal for a recheck to the P.F.A.A. office in Regina, nevertheless I still have coming to my office complaints from various farmers who have not as yet been eligible for payment. I should like to have, if possible, a clarification of this order in council which, it would seem to me, makes it possible that again there will be the possibility of exclusion of farmers who, in view of the large-scale crop failure, I think should be eligible for payment. I hope the department will see fit to be just as lenient as possible this year with regard to payment of P.F.A.A. payments to farmers in Saskatchewan.

I want to point out that in some parts of my own constituency in particular we have had not only last year's crop failure but two or three years of extremely poor crops where we have had flooding. Consequently some farmers today are finding themselves in bad financial positions. I therefore hope that the minister can give me some clarification, if he has this order in council with respect to change in the regulations whereby a farmer now apparently is not eligible who has sown

[Mr. McCullough (Moose Mountain).]

in 1954 10 acres of rust-resistant wheat and has had a yield of 10 bushels or more per acre.

In this regard I should just like to refer the minister to the remarks made by the Minister of Agriculture when we were discussing this matter some weeks ago. At that time he stated that farmers who had planted over 10 bushels of rust-resistant wheat—and of course he was speaking of the Selkirk variety—would not need assistance. I should like to point out that if a farmer, by applying to the government agency for Selkirk seed, had planted in the neighbourhood of 10 acres of wheat, he might very well have received 20 bushels or 30 bushels of seed to the acre, which would give him no more than he would perhaps need for his seeding operations this year. Yet that yield would disqualify him from a payment.

I should also like to point out that it would seem to me that, as the regulations are now, while the farmer would be disqualified, he would apparently still be considered to be in the category or in other words in the six contiguous sections which under the act could be taken out as ineligible for payment. The regulation is therefore confusing to me. I hope we can have clarification of it. I simply want to point out that we have some extremely serious financial conditions existing in my constituency. Letters are coming to my office day by day. I hope that the minister will have the Minister of Agriculture look into this matter and be as lenient as possible in respect of these payments.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a word as well with regard to this item. I should like to ask the minister how many employees there are in P.F.A.A., I should like to know how many there were in 1953-54 and how many during the present year 1954-55, which increase has resulted in the material increase in connection with the administration costs.

I should also like to bring to the attention of the Minister of Agriculture, through the Minister of Finance, the number of complaints that are being received—and I think this is generally so among members coming from the western provinces—respecting the administration of the act this year. For some reason there seems to be an unusual strictness and an unusual emphasis—to a degree that has not existed in recent years—on the letter of the law rather than on the spirit. That is particularly so in northern Saskatchewan. Each day letters are received asking how the distribution is proceeding.

The other day the Minister of Agriculture told me that the total expenditure this year