

*Government Orders*

• (1640)

One of the things the minister said was that he did not want to move too fast and then make mistakes. He would rather move into it more slowly. I would certainly recommend that to him because we got into the dairy first because of an emergency situation. They are since out of it and I think everybody is happy about it now.

We got into it with the fruit growers secondly after the commodity group representatives had made their agreement with us based on the master plan. It was then up to individual farmers to choose whether or not they wanted to belong. I notice in this legislation there is reference to that as well, that it is still the individual choice.

I notice the minister saying something to the effect that the cattlemen are saying that they are going to choke on GRIP. GRIP was not used in those days, but I heard much the same response from the B.C. cattlemen's organization in B.C. when we brought in our agricultural insurance program. However, it was not very long before the cattlemen's organization out-voted the big people in their own industry and wanted to become part of the farming insurance program in B.C., and did.

Individuals signed on; they had that choice. They had to sign a five-year contract. I have heard some of the details that have been talked about concerning the legislation, talking about contracts for a certain period, not necessarily five years but certain periods of notice before they can get out.

A cap on the volume of production was used for most commodity groups. That is, the program was effective up to a certain number of cows for cow-calf operations, up to a certain number of poultry for egg laying and that kind of thing. It was not to provide an umbrella for the largest operators. It was to provide an umbrella significant enough that anybody could maintain themselves. If they were bigger than that they could still get coverage up to that limit, but that was it.

There was no cap in production with respect to the fruit growers because as you can understand, Mr. Speaker, it takes so much longer to start producing tree fruits; once you cut the trees down it would take a long time to

get back into business. So it was not practical to put a cap on the production for the fruit growers and we did not.

The premium was a three-way split. I said earlier that I wished that this legislation had been on the books of Canada when I was Minister of Agriculture. In making it a three-way premium split, it was our expectation that the federal government would move, and I know the federal minister wanted to, but he could not get the Liberal government of the day to go along with him. He told me on many occasions he would like to be co-operating and he did to the best of his ability, but he could not get this kind of a program operating. We hoped that the producers would pay one-third, that the provincial government would pay one-third and that the federal government would pay one-third.

The government was paying in the same way it used to share the UI program, in the same way that it shared other programs because in my belief the community as a whole had some responsibility for maintaining agricultural land in production or not in production, but at least maintaining it so it would be available for food production if and when it was needed. It was important, we felt, that the community should share in the responsibility for financing this program.

By the end of the program, at least by the end of the first five-year period, each commodity group was operated as a separate fund. By the end of the five-year period for each one of them, they were all in balance within dollars of a slight surplus or slight deficit, except one, and that was the fruit growers. Of course the government paid two-thirds hoping that the federal government would come along with its share later on.

Nevertheless, there were years when the pay-out was much larger than the fund and the government put up the money to fund it until it could recover it. It did that with most of the programs, because they were hurting when the commodity groups asked to get in. If they were doing very well, they would not have asked, so there was a deficit, initially, in all of them.

As I say, four of them paid off the deficit by the end of their five-year term, and the fifth one, the fruit growers, I suppose never did. The fruit growers is a tough one to deal with.