

Soil Erosion

Evidently the question of soil erosion and degradation is just one important but very profound example that indicates to us as Canadians the necessity for coming to grips with the need to proceed with exploiting our environment in the manner implied by the words "sustainable development". That is, a manner which ensures for future generations the ability to exploit these resources without bringing about the kind of crisis we are experiencing today and which brings this motion to the floor of the House for your attention.

● (1420)

Recommendations on how to deal with this matter and the action plan have been spelled out by the Science Council and the Senate Committee. We now need the political will to implement it for the sake of present and future generations of farmers who are on the front lines facing soil degradation. They are sending signals of distress to governments at all levels and asking that we rearrange our priorities in order to ensure that they and future generations have the ability to sustain the productivity of the land on which we will depend for many, many years.

Mr. J. R. Ellis (Prince Edward—Hastings): Mr. Speaker, before I start to deal with the main points of the Member's motion, I must say that the Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), who comes from Toronto, would not know a great deal about soil degradation in Canada without doing a lot of studying. In fact, the urban sprawl which has been occasioned by the expansion of cities such as Toronto has probably taken away more good farm land than all of the causes about which he has spoken.

Having teased him a little bit about that, I must say that I do not have a lot of trouble with his motion. In fact, if the motion had said: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Government has considered the advisability of introducing", et cetera, et cetera, and is being complimented on it, I could support it 100 per cent. The fact is that the Government has done a great deal in this area given that the area of soil conservation is basically a provincial reserve.

I disagree with the Member entirely when he says that the work done by the federal Government has been invisible. In fact, as I will point out in a few moments, the federal Government has done a great deal through co-operation with the provincial Governments.

In the County of Prince Edward which I represent there is a very fine staff, the members of which I happen to know personally, which works with dedication toward soil conservation. In that area the problem is caused more by water erosion than wind erosion.

In passing, I would ask whether the Member for Davenport happened to see on public television emanating from the United States one evening about a week ago an excellent program on soil conservation and the methods used by natural farmers in the United States. I have asked for a copy of the

program to send to the farmers in my area because I know many of them are interested in it.

The points I want to make have to do with the current efforts of the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada does recognize the serious nature of soil conservation and the threat which such degradation causes to the continued viability of our soil resource. This is one of the many agricultural problems facing farmers today.

As some of my colleagues will point out, Agriculture Canada is in the process of developing a comprehensive approach to this problem as well as other issues related to soil and water conservation. However, there are a number of activities currently under way which address this particular problem. In the few minutes available to me I intend to cover as many of them as I can.

In the Prairie region, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Agency has taken significant steps to address soil degradation through federal-provincial ERDA agreements in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and by interim working agreements with the Alberta Department of Agriculture.

During the period 1984-89 over \$14 million will be spent in the Prairies on activities directly promoting and assisting improved soil conservation. As part of these initiatives soil conservation groups have become major partners of the federal Government in PFRA soil conservation activities over the past two years.

The groups vary in size and structure. In some cases farmers have organized as co-ops, others operate as non-profit societies, and still others participate in government programs through their agricultural extension boards. In Manitoba some PFRA "partners" are bona fide conservation districts under provincial legislation.

Under the ERDA agreements in Manitoba and Saskatchewan there are over 40 farmer groups. In Alberta programs are offered through municipal agriculture service boards. The combined membership of farmers allied for conservation in the three prairie provinces now approaches 2,000.

The problems they are tackling cover the entire range of degradation issues. In Manitoba wind and water erosion are high priorities. In Saskatchewan major concerns range from salinity in the southwest to acid soils in the northwest to solonchic soils and salinity in the southeast.

To digress briefly, Mr. Speaker, as you and my colleagues will understand, notes for addresses in reply to a motion such as that of my friend are prepared by experts. When I came across the word "solonchic" I started looking in the dictionary. Coming from an agricultural area I have been familiar with agriculture and agricultural terms for many years. We could not find the word in the first two dictionaries we tried. However, thanks to the perseverance of the Member for Carleton—Charlotte (Mr. McCain) we found that solonchic soils are basic soils containing carbonates and sulphates which are erodible and found in arid areas. Therefore, we are talking