

Supply

Under the Liberals, the payment would have been \$83,000. Now, under our Government, the cost would be \$54,000, a saving alone to the typical farm operation of \$29,000. If you add the gas rebate tax—and we have rebated all federal sales and excise taxes to the farmer—there is another saving of \$5,000.

We made 16 campaign commitments. To this point we have fulfilled 14 of them. We are going to fulfil them all. In addition to the 14 that we have already fulfilled, we have done many, many other things. We have taken over 400 initiatives. That is an initiative every other working day that we have been in office. We have delivered well over \$6 billion into the hands of Canadian farmers. I see that my time is up, Madam Speaker. I have not really had time to deal with the important things which our Government has done on behalf of Canadian agriculture in the international market-place. The leadership has been taken by the Government through the Prime Minister. The leadership role in the international market-place will continue to be played by the Prime Minister in the world forum and at international meetings.

● (1650)

I regret very much that I do not have adequate time to deal with this. Our commitment to the Canadian agri-food industry is not verbiage. When we took office, we took action. We are not acting unilaterally but are working in concert and in co-operation with the farm leadership of Canada. We have stood by the farm leaders in the past and we will stand by them in the future.

Mr. Hovdebo: Madam Speaker, I am sure the Minister does not want to emulate Nero who stood fiddling while Rome burned. Right now, the Government is fiddling while farmers are going broke.

I know the Minister can relate all the problems farmers are having to a series of decisions made both on and off the farm over the last many years. However, one of the most important things right now is that many farmers would like to have some assurance from the Government that the Government will continue to take some of the actions it has taken.

It has concerned me that over the last few weeks, a number of farm organizations have interpreted the Minister's meeting with them as being a guarantee that there will be assistance made available, while in the House the Minister has never committed himself to providing that kind of assistance. I am not talking particularly about deficiency payments. When I ask about the kind of assistance that will be available, I am not saying that it has to be acreage, production or per-bushel payments. It can be production-neutral. Farmers do want some assurance that returns from their farms, after taking into account grain stabilization and insurance, will at least be as high as they were last year.

As the Minister knows and has often said, in this past year, even farmers without debt were still unable to make money. If, after taking all government programs together, the farmers'

income drops below that which it was last year, all farmers will be losing money, not just those with debts.

Mr. Wise: Madam Speaker, I want to be as helpful as I can in response to the Hon. Member because I believe he is the only farmer who sits on the opposition benches and I think he understands agriculture to a reasonable degree.

Mr. Nystrom: What about Vic Althouse?

Mr. Wise: Yes, I must also acknowledge the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse). I do not sense the same necessity as the Hon. Member does. There seems to be more on the down side of making a specific announcement at this time than there is on the plus side. I know it is a subject of debate, but we should take a look at the risks involved. Look at the risk involved if a formula were used on cultivated acres rather than seeded acres. There would be a risk if we indicated that assistance would be the same as it was last year. After quick calculations, those in the west would do certain things and those in the east would more than likely transfer from soybeans to corn based on the deficiency payment. We cannot get by this problem at this time.

As I indicated before, we have a mandate through the clear statement that the Government will spare no effort and a mandate through the Budget announced by the Minister of Finance which authorizes my colleague and me to reconvene meetings and go forward. We sat down with the farmers on March 5 and they joined with us in making a statement. Clearly they have asked me not to make statements of the kind to which the Hon. Member has referred at this time for all of the reasons the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) would understand.

It is next to impossible to respond by providing anything that would be production and market-neutral other than what I have already provided to the Hon. Member. At this point, the final payment under the Agricultural Stabilization Act has gone out as has the final payment under the Western Grain Stabilization Act. The \$700 million portion of the \$1 billion that was made available is now available if all the applications come back to us by March 31, a very crucial date for farmers. If they respond by that time, then we can issue the cheques and every cheque we have issued has been right on time.

There will be an interim payment under the Western Grain Stabilization Fund. Everyone knows that that fund is in a deficit position, but the Government has a responsibility and the will to honour its commitment to Canadian farmers. The payment will provide direct dollars out of the federal Treasury. We have a responsibility to do some management. We think we have done that and in our discussions with the farmers, they appear to agree.

I can understand the Hon. Member's frustration. I suppose he will have to bear with us because as long as the leadership is telling me to do certain things, I am quite well advised to take their advice.