

### *Supply*

Agriculture Canada is predicting that realized net income for Saskatchewan farmers for this year will be about 30 per cent below the 10-year average and the 1993 forecast is set for a realized net income of only \$238 million or about \$4,000 per farmer. We have a serious crisis on our hands that must be addressed.

As the rally indicated, we need the injection of cash but we also need the protection of the Wheat Board and the security that the maintenance of the Crow benefit provides to all the producers in Saskatchewan. Without the maintenance of these longer term programs the other policies are simply band-aids that will eventually fall off and create the damage we are trying to prevent.

**Mr. Geoff Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Asiniboia):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity on this opposition day to participate in this debate. It stems from a New Democratic Party motion which is critical of government policies toward agriculture.

In part, I would like to address that motion from the perspective of a member of Parliament who represents an area which is indeed as grain dependent as any part of the country. It is the southwestern and the south and central part of Saskatchewan which consists of some 25,000 square miles. I have 9,000 to 10,000 of the farmers in Saskatchewan and probably about 20 per cent of the viable farming operations.

I spent the first three weeks in January travelling around my constituency. I met with rural municipal councils. I met with groups of 6, 8 and 10 producers here and there. I tried to do this, quite frankly, in the absence of the representatives of the so-called organizations of whatever stripe. I tried to get away from them and just talk with farmers at the grass roots.

I fear that sometimes when the farm organizations come with policies, they are at a national level, or at the very least at a regional level. I am not entirely satisfied that they speak for all of their members. That was the reason for trying to get right down to the grass roots. I can attest to the fact that there is an enormous amount of frustration, disappointment and despondency out there.

First, I want to talk in terms of the history of the prairie grain sector. Then I will talk about the reality

which it faces today, the politics of it and the hope that maybe there are some solutions and answers out there.

This is a relatively young sector of our economy. The prairies were for the most part settled in the early 1900s. It was a deliberate policy to settle and to populate the west. The offer was made throughout the world that people could come to Canada. They came on the promise of free land. They came as well for the kind of opportunities and freedoms which our country has and maintains proudly to this day.

People came from the northern United States, eastern Canada, Scandinavia, the British Isles, Germany, Ukraine, Poland and literally from the four corners of the earth. They came to settle the prairies.

It is very interesting and almost unparalleled in history that the country was laid out ahead of time. It was surveyed into sections or square miles and townships which consist of areas 6 miles by 6 miles, or 36 square miles. It was all laid out ahead of time and when the homesteaders came they had the opportunity to file for a particular quarter section of land. It was theirs provided they broke it up and cultivated a certain portion of that ground. They had the opportunity to build on it.

The information indicates that the number of farms peaked at a fairly early time during this century. I believe that in Saskatchewan, there were around 100,000 farms in the 1920s and 1930s and that the average farm size was in the area of 350 to 400 acres. If one follows that sort of chart, one will see that the number of farms has been steadily declining ever since those peak years. That decline continues today.

One will see as well that there is a corresponding increase in the size of the farms, which are now in the area of about 1,100 acres.

The west was laid out before the people came. It was the era of the steam engine. There were places for the train to take on water every five or six miles and it was around those spots that towns and villages grew up. That is where the grain elevators were constructed and that is where the farmers would haul their grain to the elevator so it could later be shipped out by rail to tide water and on to export.

There was a long and glorious history where the prairies were the bread basket of the world. There were