

Feed Grains

Mr. Whelan: I listened to the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner). I heard his worldly suggestions. He has had long experience in this House, but I must say he did not add very much.

The rumours, charges and counter-charges that are flooding the news media every day are not helping the situation one bit. In fact, I had to send a telegram to the 10 provincial ministers of agriculture to reassure them that no announcement would be made until we had another chance to discuss the feed grains situation together in Charlottetown on July 24.

There has never been anything that has been discussed so much by so many people in Canada, recognizing there are problems with the feed grains policy, without reaching any conclusion. My colleague the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) pointed out what Ted Boden and other farm leaders in Canada have stated. I think this is the feeling of a great many farm people who have not been quoted publicly.

We also hear about grain production. We did tell the farmers to produce more grain. I think hon. members are under-estimating, even those from the west who spoke about grain production. More fertilizer has been used in the west than in any other time in the history of Canada. This can only add to production. Unless there is some catastrophe between now and harvest time, one of the biggest crops in history should be harvested in western Canada.

There has been a lot of talk about orderly marketing for feed grains on the Prairies, and a few spokesmen have said that the Wheat Board should keep its present position in the market so we will have orderly marketing. Let me point out just exactly what is that position. In 1969-70 the Wheat Board had absolutely no control over the marketing of 55 per cent of the barley that was produced. Fifty-five per cent of the crop moved from farm to farm, from farms to feedlots, from farms to feed mills, or was used right on the farm where it was produced. The barriers preventing sales from province to province meant that 55 per cent of the barley produced that year was sold in the pressure-cooker chaos of a small, local market. I cannot understand how anyone can call that orderly marketing. Somebody, somewhere, has their facts terribly mixed up. If they have the facts in front of them, they are certainly not releasing them but hiding them so they can mislead the farmers of Canada.

In 1969-70 farmers on the prairies sold 186 million bushels of barley on their own, without any cash advances, price guarantees or quota, on artificially restricted market outside the power of the Wheat Board, compared with 40 million bushels sold in the east and British Columbia. In 1970-71 189 million bushels, or 48 per cent of the total prairie barley crop, faced the irregular demand of local needs only. In 1971-72 212 million bushels of barley stayed within the prairie provinces out of a production of 570 million bushels. This grain is being sold and used completely outside of the Wheat Board marketing system, completely outside of quotas or price guarantees, and with access to a nation-wide market restricted.

This is a fact that has been overlooked and neglected in all of the heat and emotion that is arising over this issue today. Let me assure hon. members that this is a fact that we are taking into account in the development of our new

national feed grains policy. Notice I said "our" and "national".

Let me assure hon. members that we intend to bring orderly marketing into this very important sector of our national feed grains industry. We are going to develop a national feed grains policy that will be fair and equitable right across this country, from the Pacific to the Atlantic and for all sectors of our agriculture industry. It would be interesting for hon. members, especially those from Saskatchewan, to read what the Saskatchewan minister of agriculture suggested for a feed grains policy. Of course, the premier slapped him on the fingers for what he said, but that was his honest opinion on what a feed grains policy should be. We are considering all suggestions made to the government. We even considered the suggestion of the Saskatchewan minister of agriculture, for whom I have a very high regard.

I promised my provincial colleagues I would discuss our thinking on a new national feed grains policy before any announcement is made. I intend to keep that promise. If any feed grains policy this government should adopt is proven not better than the one we have now for both producers and consumers, I will be the first to recommend that we change it and change it quickly.

I will be like the farmers across this land. When new productive ways are suggested to them, they are quicker to grasp them than farmers in any other part of the world. When new ways of farming are presented to them, they are quicker to grasp them than when anything new is offered to any other part of society. Farmers will recognize this. If it is no good, they will be the first to tell me. That is the approach I, as Minister of Agriculture, will follow on a feed grains policy for this nation.

Mr. Elias Nesdoly (Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) announce today he will have a national feed grains policy that will be satisfactory to all interests in Canada. The minister has been very adept at travelling around the country making speeches. In fact, he has been making speeches and not doing much else. We look forward with anticipation to some action by the Minister of Agriculture.

I was amused to hear the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board denigrate the Conservative party over the fact they are good predictors after the event. However, I remind the minister that a few years ago we had a small problem called Lower Inventory For Tomorrow, the dubious program called Operation Lift. The minister responsible for the Wheat Board predicted there would be a foreseeable surplus of wheat for world markets for quite a number of years. Within a year or two a wheat shortage developed. Wheat is in short supply in this country and there is not enough available to meet all our overseas markets.

● (2200)

I was glad to hear the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) say the Wheat Board must be strengthened, though he did not explain how. I should like to hear him tell us in greater detail what he had in mind. The hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) talked about the free movement of grain in Canada. He did not say what he