

Supply

The federal government has put forward a program under NISA which would provide cash assistance relating to the 1990-91 crop year. It is my understanding that if the Ontario government would opt into that program, it would require a commitment of between \$8 million and \$10 million dollars for the province of Ontario, which does not sound like too much, looking at the magnitude of the problem out there. For that kind of a commitment by the province of Ontario, there would be some \$24 million to \$25 million available to Ontario farmers, grains and oilseeds producers, for corn, wheat, soybeans and other crops.

There is an existing mechanism. What they have to do is opt into that 1990 crop year and give their contribution, which I believe works out to .5 or 1 per cent. The figures are there. It is a pretty significant contribution.

Another area where I think it is very important for the hon. member to try to use his influence with Mr. Buchanan, the Minister of Agriculture for Ontario, is for special funding under the crop insurance mechanism. They have not calculated the total amount there but clearly, five counties in southwestern Ontario, especially Essex, Kent, Middlesex and Elgin and I believe one other, have suffered terribly. There is a need for special mechanisms under emergency funding or crop insurance.

I would ask if the member would try to use his influence to pry loose those extra funds.

Mr. Althouse: Madam Speaker, I am aware of the problems in that area of Ontario. I was there a couple of weeks ago and I am going back this weekend. I should remind the member that when there are drought zones of that magnitude, the crop insurance program under the existing federal-provincial arrangements functions as it has in the past. The federal government has on a number of occasions provided assistance whereby they have ignored losses from the previous year so that the coverage levels stay the same. They do not lose the step of coverage which is built into the program, which the member will understand. I expect that since it is a long-standing program, it will come into place.

My experience in having gone through that several times in corners of Saskatchewan, that I do not reside in, is that generally, later on in the year you will see such an

announcement. It will be in place for the use of the farmers some months down the road.

• (1050)

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Madam Speaker, I think that this is an extremely important debate that is before the House because we are faced with a very critical time in Canadian agriculture this fall. I think that the motion today follows a motion which was put in the agriculture committee and was adopted unanimously.

The important part about this resolution today is that the member for Mackenzie has suggested that this is not a motion of lack of confidence in the government. I am sure that he did it deliberately because I do not think the people out there, especially in the farming community, exactly understand what goes on in Parliament. Maybe we raised their expectations too high because we passed a unanimous resolution in committee calling for special emergency assistance for compensation for the 1990-91 crop year.

Every time the agriculture committee passes a resolution it does not mean that the House of Commons, and most importantly the government, immediately responds. If this resolution were to be carried today, then I think that the government would be honour-bound to implement it in a fair way. It has a certain mechanism in it describing what amount of assistance is necessary, on the basis of the understanding that members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture had. So it is very important that it be done in a fair and honest way. If this recommendation and proposal to provide a net amount that would be available under the GRIP and NISA system had been in place for the 1990-91 crop year, those amounts of funds would be provided.

I know that there are debates going on between the government's minions and the agriculture community, arguing those figures and that, in my view, is really unseemly because of the desperate situation.

It seems to me that the motion that is before us today is about two or three things. It is really about human disaster in thousands and thousands of farming communities across Canada for hundreds of thousands of farm families. It is about a government's commitment and a government's word. It is about a trade war that has been going on in grain for the last four or five years. Most of all, it is about the government's response to that disaster, the government's commitment, whether it is going to