

supplies of grain. Crops have failed in western Canada once or twice.

I understand that snowfall this past winter has been below average in many parts of western Canada. Perhaps we are at the beginning of a cycle of smaller crops. The Canadian government would be wise to look ahead. We should guarantee our supplies. After all, the Minister of Agriculture did pledge the countries attending the World Food Conference that we would provide a certain quantity of grain. It is very nice when he can say that. It is nice when the farmer has that grain on his farm or in his own elevator. However, if the cost of keeping the grain in the elevator becomes too much, and it is no longer to his advantage to have that grain on his farm, then we will not be able to meet that kind of commitment.

● (2150)

I got a real charge out of the callousness of the Minister of Agriculture when he said, "Produce all the wheat you can produce, seed all the acres that can be seeded." How does he know how much should be seeded? We really do not know. This is what the farmers are now asking. To be fair to the minister, we are only talking about four or five million acres, because we run very close to the maximum of our seeded acres in western Canada. It would not be good business practice for the farmer to take the stubble and use that for a double crop. If he does not pay some attention to conservation he will not have any good land left. The farmer learned that lesson the hard way.

When the program was introduced the Minister of Justice said the government would pay farmers to take their land out of production. There was absolutely no justification for that program. That stupid piece of advice probably cost the farmer hundreds of millions of dollars.

Wheat has become very important to this country. Many raw materials have also become important in the past five or six years. However, wheat is a renewable resource, one which we have become excellent at producing. We have good wheat and we have good markets. We should be providing a storage facility that will guarantee those markets against any kind of situation that may develop. It need not be a disaster in this country but one that may occur in any part of the world. We should be able to guarantee two full years of supply of wheat at any given time rather than the haphazard system we now have, where we are not sure what kind of wheat is in storage because much of it is stored by the individual farmer.

The farmer wants stability. It is foolish for the farmer to divide his production between grain and some other area of agriculture. If stabilization of income is good for one farmer, it should be good for all farmers. The only way that can legitimately be done is for the Minister of Agriculture to demand from the government that he get back control over that field. The whole industry must be stabilized. A farmer's income must be stabilized at a level that will cover all his costs of production.

Many years ago we recommended a guaranteed forward parity price for all agricultural commodities. This does not mean that you boost the prices of commodities. Before the farmer plants his crop, he is told how much the government is willing to take and at what price. If he can get more for it, that is fine. If not, he has that guarantee from

Western Grain Stabilization

the government. The amount will cover his costs of production; labour, interest on investment, some allowance for depreciation and wages. Surely nothing less than that is satisfactory today for our farmers whether they are in the maple syrup industry, grain, or any other field. We ask that the Department of Agriculture provide this stabilization for farming.

There is another factor that is not only important to Canadian consumers but to the world. We are in a position where we can greatly increase our production of almost any agricultural commodity. It is in everyone's interest that we provide two things, stability of income for those on the farm and an ability to go into farming for those who are not fortunate enough to inherit farms from their relatives.

We are negligent if we do not provide for another generation of agricultural producers. We have not given any real assistance. Any assistance that has been given has been by the provinces, and most has been detrimental. All across the country provincial governments encouraged young people to go into the cow-calf operation. The bottom fell out of the market and they were stuck with very large debts.

When we travel across the country to meet the farmers I hope the minister will be reasonably open-minded. The cabinet and members in the House are treating the hon. member for Assiniboia very poorly. I am sure that he has all the responsibility and does all the work connected with the wheat board. If we are not willing to have this back under agriculture, the hon. member should be appointed the secretary of state for the Wheat Board.

Mr. Reid: Minister of State.

Mr. Peters: That is an operation that demands some responsibility. I have always been shocked by the flippant way in which the Minister of Justice handles his responsibility for the Wheat Board. He does not know the difference between his responsibilities and those of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). He gets them confused. He has now reached the stage where I expect him to be making a housing proposition for farm women in western Canada. However, he does not give any attention to those areas that warrant it.

When the western Canadian farmers provide the agriculture committee with the information they require, I hope the government will be more flexible than last time. Mr. Douglas of Assiniboia might have lived a lot longer if the government had not been as unfair to him as it was in the requests it made of him, and the unreasonableness of some of those requests.

I suggest that a lot can be learned by travelling across the country to meet farmers. Stabilization could probably be a workable tool for western farmers if the government would adopt the attitude of allowing input from the farmers in a just and reasonable way instead of being dogmatic, as the Minister of Justice has been with every bill he has introduced.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Ten o'clock.