

*Food Aid*

Not long ago I had an opportunity to attend a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and during his remarks my hon. friend dealt rather extensively with the effect of the encroachment of desert on good agricultural land. This was something I had not really thought about or read very much about. I found it a very interesting phenomenon, but if it is as extensive as some of the people who have given scientific papers dealing with climatology and the encroachment of desert indicate, I think this will be one of the emerging issues we will be talking about a great deal in the years ahead as agricultural production is affected.

● (1612)

I do not recall accurately the numbers the minister was using that evening, but it did seem to me that the magnitude of the expansion of desert into good agricultural land was greater by a large measure than any encroachment of the urban society into good agricultural land, and therefore might give some indication of the size of the problem we are talking about. I am sure my good friend across the way is quite an authority on this. Perhaps he will be speaking later in the debate, and perhaps he might address some remarks to this question, because if he did he might enlighten a large number of members of this House on this interesting and very serious problem.

The real problem comes down to more effective use of the land resource. The ratio of the total land under cultivation to total population is .6 hectares per person in developed countries and .3 hectares per person in the developing countries. Those statistics indicate the high degree of efficiency which exists in North American agriculture and the long way efficiency has to go in developing countries.

There is a considerable amount of potentially arable land in the world. We could probably double the area under cultivation. However, as various studies have shown, it would require substantial sums of money to get this potential agricultural land under cultivation. Perhaps I might also add that it seems to me that even in Canada—and I have a much better knowledge of Ontario; I was born and raised in a farm community—the number of acres under cultivation could be greatly increased. In fact, I am sure it could be doubled. I just wanted to interject my own point of view.

When we start talking about the world food supply, we always seem to talk about the potential to produce, and somehow we leave the impression that our agricultural sector is not doing its share. The agricultural sector in Canada is, I suppose, one of the most productive of any in terms of the productivity we often talk about in this House. I think the agricultural sector in Canada has increased its productivity on a percentage basis faster and further than almost any other sector. In terms of encouraging more land use in Ontario and across the country, it should be stated that this would be fine if someone other than the farmer was willing to pay for it.

Many people in our urban society continue to think that there is the potential in Canada to feed the rest of the world. I think I said that 85 per cent of the world's grain production is on the North American continent. If we are going to increase land use, people other than farmers should have to bear the costs of continued low prices for marginal operations. If exports to developing countries need to be financed, and in many cases underwritten, that should be the responsibility of some sector other than the farm community. I suggest that the farm community in Canada is ready, willing and able. It has been demonstrated by outstanding new farmers that they can get started, and some report to me quite often that they are making substantial progress. This could be achieved quite easily, but the people of Canada must decide that they want to contribute in a more substantial way to a world food program. That assistance and that commitment should be financed either by the treasury of the Government of Canada or in some other way, but it should certainly not be the responsibility only of the farm community.

The Food and Agriculture Organization states that about two billion people out of the three billion in developing countries are dependent on agriculture for a living. They produce only 40 per cent of the world's food. By country, the proportion of population turning to agriculture for a living in developing countries ranges from 50 per cent to 90 per cent. There are thus too many people in agriculture in developing countries, and they are not producing enough food.

I am sure all members of this House have listened a number of times to the Minister of Agriculture when he has talked about the tremendous increase in productivity we have experienced in Canada since World War II. One Canadian farmer produces enough food for himself, his family and 50 other people. That is almost double the production of back in the fifties. Contrasting that with the situation in developing countries, I can understand the changes which will be required to make agriculture a highly productive occupation and to utilize the land in terms of its potential to feed people.

On a per capita basis it is estimated that developed countries produce annually over 600 kilograms of grains, while developing countries produce close to 200 kilograms. Again, that indicates that agriculture in this country per man produces something like three times what developing countries are producing, and with a third or less of the manpower.

On the income side, the average per capita income in developing countries is less than one tenth of that in developed countries. This in itself is a very large problem. Because per capita income is so low, it is almost impossible for people to accumulate enough capital to enter into extensive mechanization. It must be very difficult to enter into any type of program which would allow land assembly of sufficient quantity that mechanization would make any sense. I suppose in most of these countries the only solution would be fairly extensive