

Agriculture

● (1630)

I believe I have only 15 minutes, Mr. Speaker. If that is the case I should like to touch rather briefly on two points that I feel are important. The Minister of Agriculture alluded to the fact that the Farm Credit Corporation at the present time is going great guns. He mentioned that it was making more loans and satisfying more farmers. He suggested that there really is nothing wrong with it at this time. This kind of statement really places a question mark in most people's minds, because we all know nothing is so good as not to need change. I believe it is a fallacy for someone to suggest that no changes are ever needed. When one does so he is not only deceiving himself but also the people of the country. The Farm Credit Corporation is in need of changes. In certain segments it does not respond at times to the wants and needs of the farmers.

I should like to depart slightly from the speech of the Minister of Agriculture and try to outline briefly some of the things we believe might be helpful in respect of revising and improving the Farm Credit Corporation. We feel that part-time farmers should be allowed to qualify for farm credit and farm improvement loans where it can be demonstrated that the borrower has both the intention and the ability to become a full-time farmer. At the present time this is not the case. We should also like to see the Farm Credit Corporation used, at the discretion of the minister, in cases of partial non-payment of a farm mortgage where disaster strikes a crop in a specific area. We have seen such situations in the past year and a half. There have been specific instances where through no fault of their own agricultural producers have been almost forced off the land. I should also like to see a provision to make deferred interest payments on loans possible during the initial period, especially in respect of young farmers. This is a very important point. I certainly hope the minister will consider that thought, although I realize he has indicated that everything in respect of the Farm Credit Corporation is rosy.

Mr. Whelan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I did not indicate that. We are drafting new legislation and if the hon. member has anything to contribute I would be glad to hear it.

Mr. Murta: That is not a point of order. This interruption is an indication of another thing we notice about this minister. He is very touchy. The fact is that when anyone tries to criticize the minister—

Mr. Whelan: He responds.

Mr. Murta: —he responds and strikes out. The minister says he is drafting farm credit legislation. We will see, if and when it is drafted, whether or not the Minister of Agriculture has taken any heed of the points put forward by the opposition in the debate today.

We would also like to see a system of open-ended mortgages for farmers to make possible additional borrowing without refinancing and new security. From all our observations and discussions across the country we feel this is another area in which the Farm Credit Corporation could play a far greater role in agriculture.

[Mr. Murta.]

The second point on which I should like to touch concerns feed grains and the marketing of feed grains. The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Gleave) touched on it very briefly. At the present time we have a feed grains policy brought in by the government that is almost an impossibility because the majority of the people, except the few the minister responsible for the Wheat Board spoke to at his meeting, do not really understand the policy. It is a system under which at last count there were, I think, four or five barley prices including those of the provincial governments.

The situation is very mixed up and confused so far as feed grain marketing is concerned. I think this brings out the point that any government that tries to tinker with the basic premise of supply and demand will find itself in a very difficult position and one which is hard to explain to the farmers of western Canada. The situation is most confused and the road ahead is less clear than it was before the minister set out in the early part of August to solve, as he said, the feed grains problem. More than anything else, I believe the events so far illustrate that no pricing system can be workable, let alone fair, unless prices are allowed to find their own level in actual commercial transactions. I believe it is impossible for any arbitrary plan or paper formula to anticipate every possible effect and side effect, incidental or deliberate.

The new policy was worked out very laboriously and in some detail. It will succeed or fail because of influences which were not even imagined back in August before the blueprint for this policy was drawn up. I think this should be a lesson to all government planners, certainly those in the minister's department, who fill in the fine detail of any governmental program of this kind. It should be plain to them that any price not arrived at in a completely free market will be an artificial price and that artificial prices will not satisfy all parties to any transaction and certainly will not satisfy provincial politicians. I think it should also be a lesson to the minister, if he thinks he really can have his cake and eat it too by having a semi-regulated system which preserves the Wheat Board role to pacify pro-board forces and seeks to eliminate at the same time the anomalies inevitably associated with Wheat Board control. Finally, I think it should be a lesson to those who will vote in the upcoming rapeseed plebescite because this is a very important topic, certainly in western Canada.

I believe the whole situation in respect of feed grain prices and the mix-up in which the Minister of Agriculture fines himself, resulting in his having to go and try to explain his policy personally to the farmers in western Canada, illustrates that imposing a brand new system designed in some office on an existing market causes far more trouble than it eliminates. Hopefully, we will see a far more realistic result from the vote on the rapeseed plebescite in December.

I see my time is running out, Mr. Speaker, I shall not belabour the point any longer. It certainly has been demonstrated that agriculture has come a long way. It is about time it did. However, this has been because of external forces which have played a great role in respect of the increase in farm incomes. I believe it is dishonest for the Minister of Agriculture to take the credit in this area as he does time and time again in his speeches. I