

Federation of Milk Producers, Mr. Claude Rivard, and as you know, the GATT negotiations on this matter start on Monday. We are trying to strengthen GATT article 11 which will allow our milk producers in Quebec to expand and maintain their position.

As you know, the agricultural sector does a lot more than feed the country. It employs one-seventh of Canada's labour force, requires considerable investments and is responsible for exports totalling billions of dollars.

Farm producers and the agri-food industry contribute very substantially to the prosperity of this country, and that is why the government is monitoring developments in this sector very closely.

In fact, we believe the government has done more than its share to enable the entire agricultural sector to maintain its strength, despite all the problems it is facing. Our support has been unflagging, and some excellent examples are the Special Canadian Grains Program and the Canadian Crop Drought Assistance Program.

During the last four years, over \$16 billion has been invested by the government in agriculture. If we were not convinced of the importance of this sector, we would not have done twice as much for the industry as the previous government during the last four years of its mandate.

Our programs are based on a number of different perspectives. Above all, however, they are comprehensive and support the development of all intervenors in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, I have some more examples to show how we support Canadian farm producers.

First, the national farm products marketing development project which subsidizes research and marketing, new product development, marketing studies and development of marketing strategies.

Our purpose is to help Canadian products win a greater market share, both domestically and internationally.

This plan covers up to 50 per cent of the costs for non-profit commercial organizations and affects all production sectors.

The purpose of the production development assistance project is to stimulate the economic development of the

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agricultural sector by granting financial assistance for specific projects for developing and upgrading human resource.

Under this project, \$9.5 million will be allocated this year. Part of this amount will go to fairs and exhibitions, among others.

For farmers in financial difficulty, the Government set up the Farm Debt Review Board Program. Through mediation, these boards help reach agreements between all parties so that the farmer can continue operating or liquidate his assets in an orderly way.

In three years, 7691 applications were considered by the Farm Debt Review Boards. Agreement was reached in 5143 cases, a success rate of 67 per cent. Note that the boards do not impose rules but rather use a mediation process to reach agreement amicably.

Finally, despite the dynamism of the industry and the efforts of the Government, some farmers must give up farming. For them, we created the Canadian Rural Transition Program. Thanks to this program, farmers who are forced to quit farming can more easily go into other fields.

Concretely, this program provides, for example, a transition subsidy, financial aid to pay living expenses for a certain period, help in seeking employment and assistance for all training-related expenses. It also provides employment as well as, legal and financial information.

• (1740)

So far 2,869 farmers have benefited from the program to the tune of an average \$6,600 per person.

Mr. Speaker, the government is not content to sit on its laurels. Now is the time to secure a stable and strong future for the agricultural sector. That is why we have launched an in-depth study of the national agricultural policy.

This study will enable the Canadian agri-food industry to remain active and successful in the future by taking advantage of a fast-changing and increasingly global market and of the opportunities arising from the Canada-U.S. Trade Agreement, by facing up to the new environment resulting from the Multilateral Trade Negotiations and by seizing the opportunities offered by Europe after 1992 and the growth of the Asian and Pacific markets.