

Supply

At the last provincial election, hon. members will recall that agriculture Saskatchewan spoke rather heavily and forthrightly and it told the NDP and the government in the province of Saskatchewan that it wanted to have nothing to do with socialized agriculture. As a result, the NDP were turfed out along with the land bank policies.

There is no question that agriculture is facing tough times in Saskatchewan, but I hardly think that developing a land bank system and having big brother in charge of agriculture is the way to resolve it. Given the experience of the NDP government in Saskatchewan, does the hon. member still think a land bank policy is the policy to follow? If so, why is that not the course that eastern Europe is following?

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Regina—Wascana for his questions.

First, when it comes to the matter of more acreage being put into production, that can be expected given the spring conditions. There is some optimism and hope because of the growing conditions. Many farmers are recognizing that they have to put every bit of soil and land that they own into production in order to meet their cash and credit demands.

I am sure if the hon. member for Regina—Wascana would take some time to visit some of the farmers in his riding, he will discover that they are not going to be using the fertilizers they normally would because they cannot afford them. For this government to say that it is a sign of confidence that the farmers are planting more acreage, I think it is fooling itself.

In fact, I would even prescribe a motive to that, but I will not. This government knows that the farmers are not going to be using the fertilizers that would enhance and enable them to get a much richer crop out of the land. Yes, they are going to try to press every piece of land that they have into production, but they are not going to be able to invest in fertilizers and so forth, that would ensure a bumper crop.

My hon. friend also talks about the land bank. There were some problems with the land bank. I now talk to farmers who tell me: "I wish the land bank was back." We could have changed some of the administration. Personally, I would like to have seen a dozen or two dozen municipalities forming a larger regional unit and

having that unit administer a land bank, rather than perhaps the government doing it from Regina.

One thing I will not fault the previous New Democratic Party government of Allan Blakeney in Saskatchewan for is recognizing a problem. It tried to do something about it. I give it credit for the guts and courage. In 1982, we had the Tories come in and they did away with the land bank. Guess who owns the land in Saskatchewan now? Today, agricultural lenders hold over 850,000 acres of Saskatchewan farm land. The Farm Credit Corporation, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Nova Scotia—the banks are the largest land holders in Saskatchewan. That is Tory land banking. And that is something we will not accept, nor will the people of Saskatchewan. Just wait until the next provincial election.

• (1720)

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Larry Schneider (Regina—Wascana): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that after one and a half years the opposition has finally taken this time to highlight the plight of agriculture in Canada. It is certainly overdue from their perspective.

It is not the sort of thing that this government has taken lightly. We have attempted to develop some programs in consultation with the agriculture sector which were deemed to be meaningful. However, in terms of a broader agricultural long-term program, I believe that the final resolve to the plight of agriculture still eludes not only this government, but any government. In fact I would suggest that it has a tendency to elude agriculture as well.

There is certainly no question at all that some of our farmers are experiencing great financial difficulties. Their problems are the result of successive years of weather-related disasters, lingering debt and uncertain prices caused, as my colleagues on both sides of the House mentioned earlier, by international subsidy wars.

In 1990, this government has responded to these difficult times by committing \$500 million in special assistance. The commitment was made in March along with several other initiatives. This assistance was contingent on provincial participation and as we all know, negotiations with the provinces are ongoing.