

Supply

which we can use to pick out a fair feed grain policy that will suit this nation. If we do not have enough information now we will never have it.

Reference was made to the subject of transportation and how the Canadian Wheat Board should tackle it. It may be wrong to look at the past, but I can remember that when I was chairman of the agricultural committee we made some recommendations when we were talking about the transportation of grain in the west. I remember asking the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board why he was not more concerned about transportation and why he seemed to be more concerned about having to sell wheat. At that time we made certain suggestions. So far as I am concerned they are now being picked up in many ways, but we still have a long way to go.

The suggestion was made that farmers serve in an advisory capacity on the Wheat Board. Personally, I would rather see more real dirt farmers becoming members of the Wheat Board. Long ago the farmer reached the stage where he had to become a businessman. He has to know how to manage his farm and grow the grain. Certainly he should have more say in how it is handled and sold. The suggestion that farmers should be elected to the Wheat Board is a good one. I suggested it myself.

An hon. Member: Elected by whom?

Mr. Whelan: By farmers through their own organizations, in a democratic fashion. Today the hon. member for Kent-Essex made some comments about there being no action from the Minister of Agriculture in his first three months in office. Mr. Chairman, things have happened so fast that I did not think it was three months, and I had to check the calendar. I find I still have two weeks to go before the first three months are up; but with the insecurity we have in this place, who knows whether there will be another two weeks or not. Anyway, I never made any great promise that I was going to achieve in three months all things on behalf of agriculture.

Before decisions are made I have been trying to speak to farmers and get their opinions. One of the things we were talking about was the re-establishment of the sugar beet industry in a better fashion that would provide stability to the sugar beet producers. The response that I have received from Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario has been much more than I expected from this type of approach. I now know why we lost the sugar industry in that part of Canada; there was no security in the sugar beet industry; there was no stability. I believe that farmers should not be asked to place themselves in subjection to a new sugar beet industry without an assurance of security. Security is what people in other parts of society want whether they work for government, industry or for railroads. This is what the farmers want. To get a new national sugar beet policy is not going to be easy. It must be a policy that will last for a long time, one that will provide security for sugar beet producers.

Sometimes I find difficulty in organizing a program for certain commodities that are affected by the variety of provincial programs presently in existence. Sometimes when you compare the agricultural programs of one province with those of another province you would think they were two different countries altogether: they could not be

[Mr. Whelan.]

more different if they came from different countries. It is hard for me to understand how a federal minister can be expected to act as an equalizer in some of these problems.

• (2030)

I do not think the criticism that we did not allow enough dairy quotas is justified. Last year the Dairy Commission, after consultation with all the dairy associations and marketing boards in the country, increased the dairy quota by 7½ per cent. Perhaps they should have changed the weather while they were at it, because the cattle did not get enough feed and dairy production decreased by 14½ per cent per county in most areas. Not enough butter to meet our needs was produced and we had to import 20 million pounds. Luckily, it was brought in at a low price and put on the market at the same price as our own in order to provide stability in the industry, so there was no extra cost to the consumer. Indeed, more stability has been provided to the dairy industry than any other sector of the agricultural industry in Canada.

Last year peach growers in my part of the country lost their crops because of a freeze in February. They said they never received a penny of help from this government. It is the general policy that a request for federal aid must come from the province concerned. I have checked into this matter and no request was received from the province of Ontario on behalf of peach growers, though it is claimed that this was the sole livelihood of some of them and, of course, the orchards had to be maintained for the year.

The dilemma of the hog producers in the last year has been mentioned. Mr. Chairman, the legislation is there for the hog growers that will perhaps provide stability for their industry if they want it. I do not think that when they get into difficulty they should come to the government to be bailed out. When you look closely at what they are doing, it is evident that they will create chaos in the marketplace if they continue.

I have said before, Mr. Chairman, and I say again that my main concern is to see that all the people get a square deal—not just the producers of the primary products but also the consumers.

Mr. Knight: Did you say that this morning?

Mr. Whelan: I have stated this in all my speeches. The hon. member for Assiniboia might not think it is possible to ensure a square deal for all the people, but I think it is. In the committee on food prices I stressed that farmers should not be expected to carry the full load of what we call a cheap food policy. We have to guard against this type of thing. No other part of our society has been as productive as our farmers, and all they want is their fair share.

An hon. Member: Are you going to keep out cheap food in order to protect them?

Mr. Whelan: If I had my way there would be no tariffs whatsoever; no food would be allowed into this country unless we needed it.

An hon. Member: You have been telling us in good “Whelanese” that you are running the show.