

Oral Questions

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows full well that the Government pays interest on all of the money. When the Hon. Member talks about \$300 million being all farmers' money, I am sure he realizes that the farmers have paid into this program on a voluntary basis. About 75 per cent of the farmers in western Canada belong to this program. For every dollar they put in, we put in \$2, but we pay interest on it and we also administer the program. The interest last year and the total payment in that program came to \$131 million. When the Hon. Member says it is all producers' money, he is wrong. It is not all producers' money. Producers have got back every cent which they put into that program since its very beginning. They have actually received more than the maximum amount they could put into it.

Mr. Benjamin: That is not true.

Mr. Whelan: It is a good program. The legislation, when it is brought to the House, will be readjusted. If there is a way, Mr. Speaker, that we can make a payment before the legislation even receives its final passage in this House, I am told—and our legal people are checking with the powers that be today—that there is a possibility that, after it receives second reading and the intent is clear, that possibly you then would not get in trouble with the Auditor General.

REQUEST FOR INTERIM PAYMENT

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. It concerns the proposed changes in the grain stabilization Act. The Minister is aware that the Agricultural Stabilization Board reviewing the 1982-83 crop payment on corn calculated that on a calendar year, and there was no payment. The Board then recalculated it on a crop year and made a payment. The Minister is also aware that in 1978 and in 1979 interim payments were made from the Western Grain Stabilization Fund. More than 50 per cent of the expected payment was paid out in the spring. Would the Minister bring forward immediate legislation for an interim payment based upon half the \$300 million? If he does so, we will pass it immediately upon it coming into the House.

● (1440)

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member talks about the payment that was made for corn in the Provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. It involved producers mainly in those three provinces. I am fully aware of how that program worked and why the readjustments were made. It was not as simple as the Hon. Member tries to make out. It was because farmers delivered a lot more corn and, in some increases, some held it. Because there was no real record system in that organization, no real organization which keep tabs on what they do, you have to go back to the elevators and all the grain handlers and get the evidence again from them as best as you can. A lot of it is on supposition until you

have the final year-end receipts from the producers. That is why this was done.

I hope the legislation will be presented to the House this week or early next week. The Hon. Member will have the opportunity to see it then, and hopefully that provision will be there.

REQUEST FOR PAYMENT TO ASSIST WITH SPRING PLANTING

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, again my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. He neglected to answer my previous question concerning the precedent set in 1978 and in 1979, with interim payments being made from the Western Grain Stabilization Fund in the spring rather than mid or late summer. I will quote a brief sentence in the 1979 annual report of the Western Grain Stabilization Fund which reads: "A two-installment procedure was used to enable at least a partial payment to be distributed in the spring period rather than waiting until mid or late summer".

Would the Minister bring forward legislation to make an interim payment on the expected pay-out, which he has already announced, of some \$300 million? Would he make that interim payment now when farmers need the money to go through with their spring planting?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows full well that under the present Act you use the calendar year to make that kind of payment. If you follow the present Act, there is no triggering mechanism which will allow you to make a pay-out. This is why we are changing the formula, so that a pay-out can be made, mainly because more grain was shipped and sold than was ever expected, even surpassing the most optimistic viewpoint of all the advisers and everyone else concerned with the Western Grain Stabilization Act. They never dreamed that 37 million tonnes would be sold in one year. This is why the amount of volume, the amount of money and of returns are so high. They do not allow a triggering mechanism for a payment. We will be going on a different basis so that we can make a payment if it is possible. I am as concerned as the Hon. Member that a payment be made as soon as possible.

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INCOME TAX

EXTENSION OF FILING DEADLINE FOR MANITOBA AND SASKATCHEWAN TAXPAYERS

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. He will know that over the weekend the Province of Manitoba experienced a very severe ice and snow storm which disrupted hydro, closed roads, and generally made life very miserable for its residents. Many people who had intended to file their income tax returns of course could not, and accountants were unable to complete returns. Has the Minister or his Department given consider-