

### Supply

the initial date set for the elimination of the FFAP, the Feed Freight Assistance Program, which was October 1, did not give enough time to the producers and to the industry to adjust to such a major change. Consequently, the government agreed to wait until December 31, 1995, and not reduce the level of assistance provided during that period.

While the government will eliminate the subsidy provided under the FFAP, it will inject \$62 million, over the next ten years, in the regions where the FFAP is currently in effect. Part of these funds will be used to make the payments provided under the program, until it expires later this year. The government is also providing financial assistance by giving a lump sum payment to western farmers affected by the repeal of the WGTA. We are receptive to the concerns of producers, while also showing fiscal restraint with the taxpayers' money.

This financial assistance will be provided to affected producers in every province and region in the country. How will that money be spent? As you know, we do not have that answer yet, but we decided to seek the help of experts. The government feels that those who are most qualified to answer that question are the producers, the people in the food and cattle industry, the feed producers and the animal farmers from the regions which will be most affected by the gradual elimination of the FFAP.

This is why the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced that consultations would be held with the producers, in the coming weeks and months, to look at ways to use the FFAP adjustment fund and the transition fund. Moreover, these people will look at various financing options offered by other programs run by the Department of Agriculture, including the joint investment project in agri-food research.

The government is aware that hard times lie ahead. This is not necessarily the best solution, but under these circumstances, we have to act. However, we would be grateful if the opposition could come up with better solutions. I remind the House that, because of the disastrous economic situation we have inherited from the previous government, we have no other choice but to take rather drastic measures.

National consultation is the only way to establish closer ties with representatives from the agricultural industry. Together, we can find solutions, come up with new ideas and even reach compromises that would ensure that all farmers are treated fairly. This agricultural reform should have been implemented several years ago. Think about what is happening in the area of fisheries and oceans, where the fish stock has been declining for the last ten years, where we are still waiting for changes that should have been made more than 10 years ago, and look at the results. We do not want the same situation to occur in agriculture.

• (1640)

The whole world is undergoing unprecedented changes and in turn we have to make fundamental changes to preserve our agri-food industry.

Finally, all those who know something about agriculture realize that this industry has been very efficient in the past in Canada. We are one of the most fortunate countries in the world, because our agri-food industry has evolved rather nicely. However, with all the changes that were made in terms of GATT and NAFTA, and with the competitiveness of the United States south of our border, we are under a lot of pressure.

There are times, I must say, when the dealings of the United States on the world market create unfair competition. A country with a tenth of its population is bound to be affected by its actions. This is why the Department of Agriculture must make changes. We do not want the situation to worsen. It could have very disastrous consequences for all of Canada.

So, we must recognize that the measures put forward are not perfect. But nothing is perfect in this world. Any way, the important thing is to act. As the situation evolves, we will make adjustments to ensure that all farmers are treated fairly.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I agree up to a point with the hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre who shares with me the position of vice-chairman of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I must admit that the hon. member is very knowledgeable on agricultural matters.

However, I may remind him that the country's current debt was not created by the Americans, the French or the Mexicans. Around 1969-70, the debt was almost nil. I will not tell you who was governing the country at the time, since you know that better than I do. But in 1984, when Liberals were ousted, the debt totalled around \$250 billion.

In nine years, the Tories brought the debt close to \$500 billion. His team was responsible for creating at least half of the cumulative debt. Today, the government is asking or rather telling farmers to do their share to reduce the deficit it created in the first place. And farmers, oddly enough, are being asked to do a bit more than that.

My friends opposite did not mention the fact that during the past fiscal year, 328,000 flights were logged by public servants, not including members of the House of Commons and senators. The cost: \$275.5 million. They do not mention that.

Earlier, while listening to the hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre, I was reading an editorial by Claude Rivard, Quebec