

mentioned that the utilization of conservation practices by the majority of farmers could be encouraged by the availability of more funds through programs which are seen to be fair and non-restrictive. Cost-sharing programs, tax credits and capital cost allowances were the most frequently proposed incentives in the hearings the committee held across the country, while it was suggested that other financial assistance measures should be carefully studied.

What we have to consider in the motion today is whether or not we really have a Government which is prepared to provide that kind of financial assistance, in view of the response to the debt crisis facing some 17 per cent to 20 per cent of our farmers and the move to put half the cost of disaster funding on to the agricultural producers of the country, while not requiring the provinces to make any commitment at all. What we are really asking is whether there is the political will to implement a program such as the one the Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin has put before us. If there is, obviously the exercise of a committee report would be very beneficial from that point of view. We should move ahead with it and see it go to committee. Those of us who represent rural areas know that the rural farm population represents only 4 per cent or 5 per cent of the total population. Obviously it is not a very loud voice in the over-all spectre of political power, yet this issue is very fundamental to the long-term benefits of the rural areas of Canada.

During the years I worked as a veterinarian in western Canada and then in northern Ontario and for the past 16 years as a Member of Parliament working in the rural areas of the Algoma, Manitoulin and Sudbury districts of northern Ontario, I have certainly had a chance to see the very serious problems facing agriculture. There is a need to impress upon the Government the fact that there should be a commitment to rural areas. I would like to see as part of the Hon. Member's motion mention of the quality of life, general development and a commitment to rural areas.

● (1730)

In the Senate committee report *Soil at Risk*, one of the main items was that there be on the agenda of the meeting of First Ministers' soil conservation and soil degradation. A First Ministers' conference was held in Regina a week or so ago. Clearly that item was not there. That does not mean that we should not move ahead as a committee of the House to try to deal with this motion to see if a national program can be fashioned to meet the needs recognized in the Senate committee report and determine whether there is a commitment by the Government to implement such a policy. Clearly there is a need.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this debate to discuss the proposal put forward by the Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger) to refer to the Standing Committee on Agriculture the power to study the amendments to the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act. He has a number of proposals that that administration might carry on as part of its expanded

mandate. During the course of my remarks, I would like to add to such an expanded mandate one or two other items that I think might be legitimate.

It is an extremely important topic both for Canadians and other residents of North America and we should address this problem now. With its advent in the 1930s, the PFRA showed that it was able to bring back some land that had gone beyond use. Some of the lands that were brought back into production were, granted, as grass-lands and pasture lands. They had degenerated to the point where they were little more than sand dunes. The activities of PFRA brought those back.

Vast areas of the Prairies that were devoid of any water, through the actions of PFRA had small dams and drainage systems installed. Fair amounts of water were trapped for the use of the human population, the livestock and waterfowl that passed through that region. It may not be well known in the rest of Canada, but most prairie people know that approximately 50 per cent of the waterfowl that exists in North America migrate through the prairie region. Approximately 50 per cent of that waterfowl are hatched, grow up and become usable as birds for the hunt in that part of the country.

I have noted a number of disturbing things that are happening to the wet-lands, woodlots and farm-lands of our country. The problems have not been adequately addressed, in part because of our Constitution where the responsibility lies with both the federal and provincial jurisdictions. The genius of PFRA was the fact that it succeeded in getting provincial and federal co-operation and that it channelled the job that needed to be done through that particular administration.

The Hon. Member who introduced this motion is absolutely right. We need to have an expanded and new mandate for either PFRA or some new administration which would have both federal and provincial co-operation and financing. It could be mandated by both federal and provincial governments. We should not rule out the possibility of financing from our neighbours to the south since a great deal of the benefits from the wildlife, and certainly from the water and fisheries, shifts to them.

If we properly manage our forest lands so that the silt from the mountains stops washing into the rivers, the salmon beds will be clean. We can again have salmon using the rivers and hatching. We will again get to the point where we will have full utilization of all the fishboats on both our coasts. We will not have the continuing argument and litigation between our two countries as to who is fishing how many salmon and who is responsible for dividing the salmon. We have allowed our forests to deteriorate to the point where our spawning grounds for those salmon are no longer capable of supporting fish.

I alluded briefly to the role that the Prairies play in supplying waterfowl for both nations. We sometimes forget the problems in attempting to save our waterfowl, forests, fisheries or the land over-all. It is a very complex question. Our farmers and foresters look after the land as they see fit by the rules that they have to work by. Sometimes, while they may be doing things that are considered to be very good management for their particular industry, the long-term effect may be very