

Inquiries of the Ministry

In view of the grave situation facing western wheat farmers with regard to the drying of damp grain, would the government consider providing free transportation for available grain drying equipment from eastern Canada to help alleviate the situation in the west?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, many measures are being considered to assist in the drying of prairie grain. This kind of scheme would ordinarily originate at the initiative of the provincial government. In the past such schemes as this have certainly been supported with federal assistance.

Mr. R. R. Southam (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Acting Minister of Agriculture. Can the minister now advise the house, in the light of the very serious situation in western Canada due to the cost involved in the drying of a multi-million dollar grain crop, whether the government will provide acreage payments of up to \$400 per farmer to assist in covering the cost of this very expensive undertaking?

Mr. Lang (Saskatoon-Humboldt): I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that the question of particular assistance to agriculture is specifically related to this issue. It is a rather broader one, and it is under consideration at all times.

Mr. Baldwin: It does not seem to be related to anything.

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): I have a supplementary question for the minister. On November 27 he indicated he would look into the matter of grain drying at the lakehead on a 24-hour basis. Are the lakehead terminals drying grain on a 24-hour basis at present?

Mr. Lang (Saskatoon-Humboldt): The drying facilities at the lakehead are in operation 24 hours a day, six days a week, and negotiations are under way with the labour unions to extend these operations to a seven day basis.

Mr. Korchinski: I have a further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is there insufficient grain at the terminals at present to warrant a seven days a week operation?

Mr. Lang (Saskatoon-Humboldt): There is now sufficient grain at the terminals, in store or en route, to assure a continuous operation once this can begin on a seven day basis.

Mr. Korchinski: I have one more supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. McKinley.]

Mr. Speaker: I will allow only one further supplementary question, because there are a number of other hon. members who are anxious to ask questions.

Mr. Korchinski: My question is a result of the minister's reply. May I ask the reason for the delay until now in the negotiations with the unions on this particular question? The situation is no surprise to anyone.

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the government elevator at Moose Jaw is at present only working on a five day eight hour shift due to a lack of box cars to move grain, I wonder if the minister can state whether the government has taken into consideration the complete co-ordination of the movement of box cars to transport the damp grain.

Mr. Lang (Saskatoon-Humboldt): It is true that the Moose Jaw terminal is operating on a 24-hour, five day a week basis. Moose Jaw is not in an area where there is a great problem with regard to damp grain, but arrangements have now been made to ensure that adequate quantities of damp grain will in fact find their way to Moose Jaw so as to make full use of that facility.

Mr. Skoberg: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I respectfully suggest that at present the terminal at Moose Jaw is operating on an eight hour shift. I wish to ask the minister again whether he will look into the situation, as I am certain there is a sufficient amount of damp grain to be moved.

Mr. McKinley: I have another supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the minister has placed the burden of responsibility on the provincial governments, I wonder whether he would be prepared to say, if the provincial governments would arrange to make this grain drying equipment available from Ontario, he would then provide free transportation to have it moved to where it is needed.

Mr. Lang (Saskatoon-Humboldt): I am sure the Minister of Agriculture will be discussing this question with the provincial ministers. I did not mean to suggest it was necessarily a good program, because the drying equipment required to handle the current problem is largely available on the prairies. The problem is more one of organization than of the supply of additional equipment, though no doubt additional equipment would also be useful.