

Supply

contents of the motion do not bother me particularly, because basically the Hon. Member is endorsing what we have done up to this point.

I will save the time of the House by not reading the entire motion and by referring first to item (a). If we include what the Government has done under the Special Canadian Grains Program and other programs, we see that the amount of income to Canadian farmers will be slightly higher this year. In item (b), the Hon. Member talks about a freeze on freight rates. They have already been frozen. In fact, if we had followed the pattern of the Liberals, farmers would have been paying about \$12 per tonne for the movement of grain, whereas today it is about \$6 per tonne. By freezing freight rates we have saved western farmers, primarily western farmers, between \$100 million and \$150 million.

The Hon. Member for Brandon—Souris (Mr. Clark) made a very intelligent observation with reference to item (c). With reference to item (d), the final one, we are well under way. We have been given a clear mandate by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) to meet with the farm leadership across the country, as we did last year. We had our first meeting on March 5.

What bothers me—and I guess I must accept it because when I look across the way, there is not a farmer in the whole Liberal crowd over there; perhaps it is one of the reasons we keep hearing this question—is that the Liberals have always had two ways to deal with agriculture. One was through verbiage. One does not live very long on verbiage. Second, it was always an afterthought. There is not much more nutrition in what the Liberals say in verbiage and afterthought than there is in trying to raise a group of cattle on a feedlot or a bunch of hogs in a barn on an east wind and snowballs.

However, I will say again that it is not really the contents of the motion that bother me, because we are way ahead of them on that. It is the timing. If there were any farmers or any people who had any real contact with the farming community in the Liberal Party, then it would not be pushing us at this time to make statements on certain items.

Again I draw to the attention of the House the fact that on March 5, not long ago, the Minister of State for Canadian Wheat Board (Mr. Mayer), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Mr. Gustafson), and other colleagues joined us in the boardroom of the Sir John Carling Building. On that occasion we met with 55 farm representatives, an excellent cross-section of the country. They represented some 35 farm organizations. It is important that they joined with us in making three clear statements to which I will refer. They demonstrate that it is premature and untimely to make further statements on the subject at this time for very obvious reasons. I should like to read the three statements. The first one reads: "Farm leaders today agreed that producers should base spring planting decision on market signals".

That was not me speaking as a farmer or as the Minister of Agriculture on behalf of the Government. It was a joint

statement, as it should be, made by the Government of Canada in co-operation and in concert with the farm leadership across the country from East to West, representing every possible commodity group.

Mr. McDermid: Read it again.

Mr. Wise: I hear the Hon. Member for Brampton—Georgetown (Mr. McDermid). I will read the second sentence because it is just as good. It reads: "Farmers should not make assumptions about government assistance in planning their 1987 production".

It is just as sensible as the first one. Let me read the third sentence: "It is too soon to come to any conclusions about what help will be needed or how it will be given, but we will insist that any new assistance measures be production and market neutral".

Again, it was not the Minister of Agriculture or the Government speaking in isolation. It was a joint statement by the Government and by the agricultural leadership of the country. How in the world can we make a further statement other than what has already been made? The Government will spare no effort. A clear mandate has been given to the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board and me to reconvene meetings with the farm leadership across the country. We have done that, and we will meet again. I think that meeting will be held prior to the Prime Minister's leaving Canada to attend the summit, about the same as we did last year. The Prime Minister wants to sit down again with the farm leadership of the country. That meeting will take place either in the latter part of May or the first part of June.

How in the world could we make any further statements which would be in keeping with the commitment we made with the farm leadership of the country not to violate production and market neutral signals? Anyone with any connection with the farm community would recognize the importance of that statement.

In answer to questions—and I think they were from the Leader of the New Democratic Party—in the House today, I said that Governments have various roles. Municipal Governments have to do certain things. Provincial Governments have to do certain things. Federal Governments have to do certain things. If we can stay out of anything, then we should stay out of it. There is no doubt in anyone's mind today about Governments at any level dictating how the agri-food industry in the country should run; surely no one in the House would make that comparison.

Again I say that we are working in concert with the farm community. I suppose it is a pleasant surprise. It may be shocking to the Liberals who did very little, and whatever they did was done unilaterally and in isolation. Obviously it was not in the interest of the farm community, and I guess it was not of any political benefit to the Party across the way.

Let me say that the record of the Government is second to none of any other federal Government in the history of the