

*Farm Credit Act*

up some kind of detailed program of association which has made them such a powerful pressure group that legislation, both federal and provincial, has tended to dovetail with their interests. Now, in the region of northwestern Ontario we have never had a tremendously successful farming situation. We did have the beginnings of one back at the time of Hon. John Dryden in the 90's in the development in what might be called the western clay belt and in the Kaministikwia river valley, a farm belt that depended mostly upon root crops. In addition there are those who exploit farm woodlots for pulpwood.

I have never been able to discover that there is a single measure administered by the Department of Agriculture, including this important measure, that has been of much use to the farmers of northwestern Ontario. You can go through the annual reports of the Department of Agriculture and see all the acts administered by that department. They take up a whole page of the report, but very few of them have had any consistent application in our part of the country. We have not any cold storage plants which are supported by either federal or provincial subsidies. We have had very little use of the various subsidies in relation to improving the soil. We have had very little assistance from any of the special scientific services developed, although I will grant the minister that he has made a move toward establishing a federal experimental farm in the area. However, it seems to have been a very cautious step.

I put it to the minister that in our area we, particularly the farmers in my constituency and that of the hon. member for Fort William, would appreciate a little less of what I think of as earnest blarney and a little more real appreciation by the minister of our situation. The minister is a stranger to that part of the country. Why does he not come in and tell us what he is providing now? The minister knows it is very little. I am quite prepared to accord the minister a case for the things he has done and is trying to do for agriculture, but so far I cannot see a single example of any good that has been done for the farmer of northwestern Ontario.

One of the things we would like is support prices for pulpwood. Well, that has been ruled out; we cannot have that. One of the other things in connection with income for farmers in the area and in Quebec that is very important is the price farmers get for pulpwood today. Again, we can get no help from this government either through the price stabilization board, the combines investigation branch or any of these groups. We cannot find out why the pulpwood companies are able to keep prices depressed.

[Mr. Fisher.]

Within our area, Mr. Chairman, we have more grain than any other constituency or constituencies in Canada. We have got to the place where all the various qualities of feed grains are determined and set aside, yet we have no real operation there in beef cattle, as you may assume we should have. The challenge could very easily come back that northwestern Ontario has this situation, where the farmers have to depend to a certain extent on pulpwood. If they are right next to vast quantities of feed grain, if they have any kind of reasonable climate that will produce root crops, surely they should be able to do something on their own initiative. One of the problems there is the same as that of farmers everywhere in Canada, that they have to compete in terms of their young people with industries. We happen to have a high wage area, at least in the pulp and paper industry, so it is very difficult for the farmers to get workers and it is very hard to keep the young people on the farms. This is traditional.

It is almost impossible to get credit for farm operations. However, one distinguished characteristic of farming in our area in recent years has been the fact that the genuine farmers are disappearing and fairly well to do businessmen, doctors and others in our community have been going out and buying up the land. I am not suggesting they are doing it as a sort of tax device, but you have the fact that most of our farmers are becoming what you might call gentlemen farmers. They are professional men, businessmen. They have a bit of land and, depending upon their interests, they plant Christmas trees, build up a little herd of cattle, show a few horses and cows at the annual fairs. This seems to be the trend. But the real farmer in our area who is putting in a crop or producing poultry or beef is in a bad way and is tending to disappear. The latest census figures that were provided—they are not complete in details about farm homes, farm wealth, farm equipment—indicate that the region of Port Arthur and Fort William has suffered a continuing slump since the last census in the number of people engaged in agriculture and, so far as I can determine, in actual income.

I do not want to take any more of the time of the committee, Mr. Chairman, but since the minister seems to have the figures for the counties in Ontario and Quebec I should like him, at the next stage, to tell the hon. members for Fort William and Port Arthur how much the Farm Credit Corporation has been lending in northwestern Ontario, particularly in the Port Arthur-Fort William region. I am positive it is peanuts, to use the term that