

Oral Questions

point he makes in his question. There is \$1.3 billion of cash going into the pockets of western Canadian farmers right now at seeding time which is a critical time of the year. Farmers need cash for seeding right now and that is what we are supplying.

REQUEST FOR GUARANTEED RETURN FOR GRAIN FARMERS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat carefully and slowly what I said so that the Minister can hear it. The Minister tends to answer questions in a straightforward way. He knows that the money which has been committed is for last year's crop, not for the crop which is now being put in the ground.

Will the Minister now guarantee grain producers who are planting this year's crop that their final return on this year's crop will not be one cent lower than the return they received last year which has already dropped by some 18 per cent?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, I farm and speak from first-hand experience. When farmers seed their crops in the spring they usually do it out of revenues derived from last year's sales. That is exactly what is happening. Farmers are selling record quantities to the Canadian Wheat Board which is doing a very good job of marketing. The federal Government is providing a record amount of cash. With those two factors combined farmers are equalling and probably surpassing the income they received from the previous crop.

We are performing in exactly the way farmers would expect, based on the kind of marketing they are undergoing and the normal amounts of cash they would receive from such marketing. Therefore, I do not understand what the Hon. Member is talking about. If he knew something about farming, as I do, he would not phrase his question in that fashion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1430)

REQUEST FOR INCOME GUARANTEE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the other well known farmer in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister, who did not hesitate to answer questions on this important matter when the Saskatchewan election was taking place. Will he guarantee to Canadian farmers who are putting the crop in the ground now that the money they get from that crop will not be one penny lower in terms of their final income than they got from last year's crop? Will he give that guarantee now when an election is not taking place in Saskatchewan but when there is a real crisis in western Canada?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I will acknowledge that I am not an expert in farming. I just sound like one when compared with the Leader of the NDP. The Leader of the NDP was doing well until he had Shirley Temple sitting next to him.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mulroney: The very serious question by my hon. friend was given a very serious answer by the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board who is not only an experienced public official but an experienced farmer, with vast amounts of knowledge. He has been working very closely with farm organizations and individual farmers to maintain the record of this Government's commitment to agriculture nationally and western agriculture in a special way because of commodity difficulties it is undergoing.

May I say to my hon. friend that an important part of the resolution to the problem is on the international level where, in Tokyo last year, the Secretary of State for External Affairs and I raised agriculture and the implications of commodity prices for the first time at the summit—

Mr. Broadbent: It really did a lot of good, didn't it?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: They are joking about this.

Mr. Mulroney: It is now at the GATT for the first time. I will acknowledge that there have been no overnight miracles, but there has been solid progress on a number of fronts and farmers recognize that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

CANCELLATION OF FORECLOSURE MORATORIUM—ROLE OF CHARTERED BANKS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we can get back to the serious issue facing the House today, which is the Government's announcement that it was cancelling its moratorium.

My question is directed to the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board. He is fully aware that one of the most dangerous aspects of that announcement is the signal it will send to the chartered banks which hold over \$8 billion of farm debt at the present time, that it is now open season on farmers to foreclose their mortgages.

Does the Minister or do his colleagues intend to call a meeting of the chartered banks of Canada to make it very clear that this disgraceful act by his Government should not be taken as a signal that they can start their own foreclosure actions and therefore precipitate an even broader and deeper crisis than now exists?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, let me try again to put it into some perspective. That is not what will happen. No one wants to see that happen because it is not in the best interests of farmers, banks, Governments or anyone else.

The Farm Credit Corporation will be looking at approximately 50 clients per month, which, on an annualized basis, is approximately one-quarter of 1 per cent of all commercial farms in the country. If it was believed for one minute that