

Supply

best fed in the world, and one of the fewer than half-dozen in the world which is still a net exporter of food materials.

I spoke a moment ago of the challenges and successes that the agricultural community has witnessed over the years. In my own area there have been many breakthroughs in animal health. Canadian farmers have developed many varieties of plants that are specially suited to our own environmental conditions.

Output per individual worker in urban industry has doubled since the 1950s. That is not a bad record, but we should all be grateful that the agricultural worker has done considerably better. He has quadrupled his output per capita in the same period.

All of these advances in agriculture did not just happen by accident. Aside from the time and the determination of the people required to reach these plateaus, there remains the question of money and finance.

In 1961, capital investment in Canadian farming amounted to \$13.2 billion, rose to \$57 billion in 1976, and it is estimated to be at more than \$70 billion at this time, more than \$120,000 per farmer. It goes without saying that to maintain high levels of output resulting from massive investment, sound and effective financial management is an absolute necessity. This is where Canfarm fits into the scheme of things.

The costs of operating a farm in 1980 are astronomical. Interest rates have proven to be extremely unpredictable and the low interest rates of the Farm Credit Corporation can only provide a partial escape. The federal government has a lot at stake in the farms of Canada in a very literal sense. Seventy per cent of all long-term farm debts in Canada is handled through the Farm Credit Corporation, with an additional load being carried through the Farm Improvement Loans Act. Also I have referred to the record of Canadian agriculture in holding down food costs through new and innovative technology. The over-all health of the farm sector is important in holding the line in the importation of food from abroad.

• (1610)

Canfarm is inseparable from the subject of a vibrant agricultural sector, given the scale of finance involved in modern farming. The Minister of Agriculture made the observation that the Government of Canada has put ten years of research effort and money into Canfarm. Without question, his ministry is now strapped for cash, as are all other ministries. But I do not for a moment disagree with the argument that much of the blame for the current situation of Canfarm rests on the shoulders of provincial ministers of agriculture and the farm organizations which have failed to promote Canfarm sufficiently and to recruit the members it will ultimately need to sustain itself.

Even so, I think the federal government has spent too much time, effort and money in the development of Canfarm to permit it to fold now, regardless of whether or not the present difficulties are the fault of other parties.

A significant portion of new farm loans is made to young farmers under the age of 35. The managerial assistance offered to them through Canfarm is especially valuable. One of the side effects of the high finance of modern farming is the tidal wave of record-keeping which must be maintained. Canfarm reduces this burden immeasurably for thousands of young farmers, giving them a clear idea of their financial positions. Many Canadian farm organizations have answered the call in supporting Canfarm. I urge all farm organizations to take a very close look at what is happening with Canfarm right now.

I offer the same advice to all ministers of agriculture, both federal and provincial. The collapse of Canfarm is an option which is totally unacceptable and should not be entertained by anyone for a moment. The Canfarm co-op is under the outstanding leadership of Mr. Peter Hannam currently and holds the promise of many years of productive service, if it can be preserved. Its loss would not merely be a loss to the agricultural sector, it would be a loss for all Canada, given the intimacy between agriculture and the rest of the economy. There is pressure to have Canfarm continue. Numerous blueprints for its continuation have been proposed, and we must agree on one which is feasible to all parties concerned. Is it really necessary for me to point out that it is far simpler for us to strengthen Canfarm now than it would be to try to recreate it at some time in the future? With all the enthusiasm and influence at my disposal, I strongly urge all parties concerned to go to the furthest extremes to come to an agreement on the preservation of Canfarm. We want it and we need it. The common ground is there. It is up to us to find it.

Would the minister explain where we stand with Canfarm now? What steps has he taken as minister to try to preserve this very necessary organization?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member stated, it took a long time to develop the Canfarm organization. A lot of research was put into this program, mainly by Agriculture Canada before it was started. It has a lot of experience, but it has not enjoyed the support it should have from anybody other than Agriculture Canada over the period of time from when it started back in the late sixties.

Canfarm has not received the support it should have from the provincial ministers of agriculture, farm organizations or their leaders. Actually the support from some farm organizations has pretty nearly been nil, and from some provincial governments it has been less than that, if that is possible. Since the smaller provincial governments depend on Canfarm for services provided to them because they cannot afford to obtain them from anywhere else, it is important to the smaller provincial governments. They have received some lip service from some farm organizations and their leaders in the fact that they condemn the federal Minister of Agriculture and the federal government for letting down Canfarm. If I were a farm leader, I would do more than that: I would encourage the farm members of my organization to join.

We know the leaders of the UPA in Quebec. If it was not for this session in the House, I would be addressing them later