

*Western Grain Stabilization*

produced almost totally from snow moisture, or late fall moisture from the previous year. True, we face risks of hail and frost, but these risks are minor compared with that of drought. These risks have been somewhat alleviated in recent years by various forms of technology. I am thinking particularly of the use of herbicides, much better mechanical cultivation, seeding and harvesting equipment, and of the benefits of large-scale farming. The fact remains that drought is still our No. 1 problem. I suggest that is why some regional concept ought to be introduced in this bill.

Although we face the problem of drought, we enjoy the benefits of our chinook winds in the winter. They give us the chance to graze our cattle outside for much of the winter. Those chinook winds, of course, bring about a fantastically high evaporation rate. The evaporation rate from water surfaces of sloughs, dams, and other water basins in the area is between 36 and 44 inches per year. That is the effect of these intensely hot winds. They dry up the moisture. That evaporation rate is equal to four times our normal total precipitation per year, which is between ten and 12 inches. That precipitation includes both rain and the snow equivalent.

It is important to appreciate the background for my concern. That is why I have just told the House this little story. Let me now digress again and make some more comments about the short grass ranching country.

● (1540)

The short grass ranching country, that semi-arid country for grain growing, is the original home on the prairies of the museum piece, the grain header. That was a very special harvesting machine that was designed to cut grain almost at ground level. It was designed for that area because the grain never grew tall enough to harvest with the traditional grain binder or the combine that came into use later.

The grain header, which was pushed by horses, was unique. It simply clipped off the heads, sometimes with stubble no more than one and a half or two inches tall, collected it in a header box pulled by horses, dumped it into piles, and so on. It was a great feat for a teamster to drive the six or eight horses which pushed the machine, at the same time steering it by means of a paddle in between the teamster's knees. That was a unique approach to that semi-arid short grass country that I represent.

I want to make a brief comment about the weather, as it is now a current topic of some considerable interest in that part of the country. Until the third week in March we had one of the mildest and driest winters that I can remember. There were no severe snowstorms. We had very little snow. There was not enough moisture in the soil to freeze. It was a very pleasant winter to farm and run cattle. In effect we had a winter drought. That is not unusual in our area.

By mid-March there was absolutely no moisture in the soil. The ground was not frozen as there was nothing to freeze. The run-off from the snow, what little there was, was almost over. Conditions were so dry I estimated that approximately 75 per cent of my range for my cattle would not even germinate and turn green. That is a rather

[Mr. Hargrave.]

extreme condition. I suggest it was as severe as the years 1936, 1973, and 1938, the low point of the thirties.

In the past six to seven weeks, some time after March 20 until at least yesterday, we had a fantastic amount of snow in the form of spring blizzards and rain. At one point we had between three and five feet of heavy wet snow in the area adjacent to the Cypress Hills. Most of that snow moisture has already soaked into the top soil. Very little has run off. We now have some grass and there are extremely good prospects because of these conditions.

In a period of six weeks we moved from a condition of extreme drought to one of well above average moisture. Our conditions are now such that we have enough moisture to grow a whole crop of native grass to produce the necessary feed, hay, feed grains and so on. However, one fact remains. Our growing season is almost one full month short.

There have been some serious new calf losses from exposure to the storm and calf scours. Even some mature cattle were killed in that storm in the Cypress Hills. However, on balance it was a good snowstorm in that it will do many, many times more good than the losses it caused because of its severity.

I come back to the bill to make a few further comments. There are some fundamental considerations we should note of when debating this bill. First, there is no question that both stabilization bills, Bill C-41 and Bill C-50, would me much better for all concerned if they were under one minister. It is the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who is responsible for ensuring that the farmers and producers will obtain a reasonable income from their operations. It is the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) who is responsible for this agricultural stabilization bill. Whether we agree or not, I am sure there are interlocking features in those two bills and it would be much better if they were under one minister.

I suggest there should be no limitation on size with respect to grain producers either as to acres, bushels, or dollars. By putting on a limitation we are inviting production inefficiencies. The \$25,000 eligibility level is too low, especially with today's high grain prices. This figure no longer represents a large prairie grain farm.

As the Canadian Federation of Agriculture brief on this bill points out, the plan seems to reward good fortune or good luck, and penalizes misfortune or bad luck. The prime example of bad luck is the drought hazard.

It is fundamental that governments cannot treat one agricultural commodity different from another, particularly when the commodities concerned are those of surplus producers who depend on exports to market their surplus produce. That is fundamental. It applies to grain, cattle, and even potatoes. We are involved in an export of our surplus. It is fundamental that the stabilization approach for different commodities across Canada must be reasonably the same.

The voluntary aspects of this bill or the lack of them are of serious concern to us. In this bill it starts out with a voluntary approach, and reverts to compulsory participation later. If the plan is as good as the minister feels it is then surely it will sell itself, especially with the two to one