

invite him to come to Saskatchewan, talk to the farmers there and find out what they think about the land bank project of the provincial government. I know that the hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Cadieu) finds the idea intriguing. I know that the farmers in my constituency find it intriguing, and I know the National Farmers Union does not think it is going far enough. They are not opposed to the project for the reason that the hon. member for Lisgar suggests. He is so far off base that it isn't even funny. Again I invite him to come out and talk to the farmers in my province.

Under the project, land will be purchased from older farmers who want to sell their holdings. And leased or sold to younger people who want to take up farming. I point out that the average age of farmers in Saskatchewan is 57 years. Something has to be done to help the younger fellow and this is one of the main purposes of the land bank idea. A second purpose is to make sure that land does not get into the hands of large farmers or of foreign landlords, but to make sure that it goes to the smaller fellow, the guy who needs an extra half-section of land in order to expand his farming operation. My constituents and I are interested in this matter.

Also, in Saskatchewan the provincial government introduced a piece of foreign-ownership legislation to restrict the purchase of land by foreigners. That legislation is now before the agricultural committee of the provincial legislature. It is the kind of radical step that the federal government should be considering and implementing on the national level. There is a whole series of steps that the provincial government, even with its limited jurisdiction, has taken. The federal government should be doing the same things because it has the power to do them, the authority to do them and the necessary revenues. If we are really going to help the farmers, the government will have to start doing some of these things immediately.

The farm machinery companies may not love us, some of the food chain stores may not love us, some sections of the agribusiness may not love us; but we will have to step on some of their toes in order to do something constructive for our farmers. It is the farmer I am interested in, Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservative party which is more interested in promoting Federal Grain or even some of the farm machinery companies.

Now I would like to make a few remarks about farm debt. I think this is relevant to debate on the Farm Credit Corporation. We are about to raise the maximum amount of a loan from \$45,000 to \$100,000. I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture how this provision will work in connection with co-operative farming. Is a co-operative farm made up of five, six or seven people, limited by the \$100,000 maximum stipulated in this bill? Again I would like to quote from the brief presented to the cabinet a short time ago by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Under the heading "Production Co-operatives" we find this passage:

That both Canadian and provincial governments be urged to provide for production co-operatives to take advantage of government programs as though each individual member of the co-operative operated a separate farm.

I urge the Minister of Agriculture to confirm the fact, when the bill reaches committee, that its provisions will

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treat co-ops in this manner. If not, Mr. Speaker, we shall have to move amendments to serve that purpose. I wish to make another comment about the \$100,000 ceiling provided in the bill. I think that the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. Thomson), speaking on this provision a few days ago, said he felt a bit uneasy about the volume of debt that this ceiling could imply. I know that back in 1965 to 1968, when things looked pretty good in western Canada, many farmers borrowed huge amounts of money from the Farm Credit Corporation and other lending institutions. Then the bottom fell out of the agricultural market. As a result, farmers are going bankrupt.

There are farmers in my constituency who have debts that they do not know how to meet. I receive letters from them about this problem, and every time I go to my riding people talk to me about farm debts and wonder how they can repay these loans. I would like to inform hon. members of the House of some figures released last week by the Farm Credit Corporation, showing the percentage of farm credit loans in arrears between 1969 and 1972. From these figures we find that in 1969-70, when the recession began to set in, 11.6 per cent of the loans made by the Farm Credit Corporation were in arrears. In 1970-71 that figure went up to 18.9 per cent and in 1971-72 it went up further to 21.1 per cent.

These FCC statistics reveal very clearly that farmers are in debt and will have difficulty paying off their loans. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that many of them are going bankrupt each and every week on the Prairies and, indeed, right across Canada. I am not saying this in order to reflect on the Farm Credit Corporation but to reflect on government policies that have brought about this situation in Canadian agriculture.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, we will soon have to take constructive steps in agriculture if we are to save the farmers. We will have to do something about interest rates. We should have lower interest rates, and interest-free loans for younger farmers and small farmers who want to expand their operations in order to attain viable farming units. This should be done and could be done. We give millions of dollars every year in handouts to large companies, through DREE and other programs; but when it comes to the farmer we are adamant in charging him the going interest rate. This is not just and cannot be maintained if we are to retain the rural way of life in our country represented by the family farm.

There are a number of other topics that I could raise tonight but in essence, Mr. Speaker, I have covered the main concerns of my party with respect to this bill. Previous speakers have mentioned others. The essential and central point is that we must maintain the family farm as the basic unit of production. Over the last few years the Department of Agriculture and its task force have been talking about gradually phasing out the family farm, about consolidating farms, about readjusting agriculture and making units bigger and more efficient. I would like to remind some of these people, the bureaucrats and others who talk about agriculture in terms of GNP, net income and expenses, that we have on the farm people and a way of life that are very important. It is a way of life that must be strengthened, maintained and helped in every possible way.