

Adjournment Debate

which make loans to farmers for storable crops some leniency with respect to collection. As the policy has been administered, the potato agency, New Brunswick in this instance, is responsible for collection. If it does not collect, it has to pay whatever the farmer does not pay back on the loan for storable crops. This would not be a very difficult thing to do. It is something the Minister could have done forthwith had he chosen, but he did not choose to follow that route. The farmers in this circumstance may be faced with the necessity of the agency hiring a collection agency to get the money from the farmers who do not have money enough to plant crops, let alone pay back loans. This is something with which the Minister could have dealt forthwith but did not. I do not think this is very good consideration in view of the circumstances which exist.

I repeated my question a little later, on May 13, 1983. The Minister chose to diverge from the subject matter of my question. This was particularly true on May 6 when the Minister said the New Brunswick people should have a potato marketing board as that would resolve all their problems. The Minister said every Province but P.E.I. was ready to go into some kind of an agreement. I join P.E.I. in not being willing to advise the potato industry of New Brunswick to enter into any marketing board structure as long as the Minister of Agriculture of Canada does not lay upon the table a specific arrangement whereby price and production can be controlled. In that case it becomes a socialist state which I do not like anyway. Until an agreement is tabled in this House for Members to examine I think the Province of P.E.I. has followed exactly the right route, and New Brunswick farmers would be very ill advised to fall into a trap.

Time does not permit me to expand on the trap into which they could fall but they could find themselves in a situation without a market, having lost their export market, due to control of other Provinces over our affairs, or the affairs of P.E.I. It is not an easy resolution to simply say "let us put up a marketing agency" without asking what the abilities of the agency as a marketing board in New Brunswick or as an eastern Canadian potato marketing structure would be. We have to know who stays in business. That is a divergence from the necessity which exists in New Brunswick today.

The Minister has at his disposal four avenues through which he could have proceeded. He has apparently refused to follow any of these. At this moment in time farmers are sitting idle in their homes, looking at their machinery and their fields, unable to plant crops because of the delay of the Minister of Agriculture in acting within his scope of jurisdiction and within the judicial opportunity he has to interpret the regulations. He will not say that he will defer the repayment of storage loans. He will not say he will support the provincial farm loan agency in providing any assistance it might extend to the farmers. He will not say there will be a price stabilization program to help those who have marketed as little as 20 per cent of their crop at very depressed prices.

• (1805)

This is a catastrophe, a disaster. It is not normal circumstance. The industry does not want handouts per se. However, when we have a problem of disastrous proportions the Minister should act on an emergency basis. Has he yet met with the New Brunswick Minister to discuss this?

The Minister could announce a price stabilization program which would enhance the credit of the farmers when they go to the bank so they can put in their crops. He will in no way make a statement on price stabilization. This is a discretionary capability which he has. He could do what he said he had done and has not done, namely, put Farm Credit Corporation lending officers in those areas where the potatoes are planted to approve loans forthwith on a bridge financing basis. None of these things have been done, and the planting season is upon us. I told the Minister last week, and I repeat, a week from now is too late, we need it today. The next question is will the Minister address the problem in the response which he will have dictated to somebody who will now answer me?

Mr. Jim Schroder (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, although no specific allocation of the funds under the Special Farm Financial Assistance Program of the Farm Credit Corporation has been made to potato producers, there is a conscious effort being made in the Maritime Provinces to handle these applications with urgency. To date the Farm Credit Corporation has been able to handle the demand without difficulty.

The Farm Credit Corporation has always been sensitive to the needs of farmers in sectors facing special problems, and potato producers are no exception. If the farmer is presently a borrower, the corporation can carry the account in arrears or can re-amortize the loan to help see the individual through this difficult period.

An essential part of the Farm Credit Corporation's mandate is its advisory services, to which all farmers have access. The corporation's credit advisors are trained in financial management and can help farmers work out various alternatives for their businesses.

In 1982-83, over \$4 million was approved in the Atlantic Provinces for some 46 farmers who required help under the Special Farm Financial Assistance Program. Another ten loans have been approved since April 1. This is in addition to \$10 million in regular loan approvals for 1982-83 and \$1.6 million so far this year.

Under the Advance Payments for Crops Act, \$6,801,500 has been advanced to potato producers in the Province of New Brunswick this year. These advances are considered current until July 31, 1983. The legislation for this Act does not allow forgiveness of the advanced for any reason. All advances must be repaid. However, the legislation does allow an extension of the repayment period for good cause. In this event, each producer would have to enter into a repayment agreement.

There are other possible solutions which we are currently investigating to determine the net impact on the producer. Normally the advance payments are to be repaid as the