

Farm Income

Apparently this is not the case. Once again this demonstrates just how much importance is placed on agriculture by those occupying the opposition benches who are supposed to be its critics. If more energy was directed toward finding out what was actually happening and there was less criticism for criticism's sake, perhaps they would start living up to the name of their party by becoming a little more progressive.

As I was in the United States yesterday I was unable to talk to the hon. member for Elgin. Perhaps if I had been here I could have said: "Look, to be really constructive today you can say anything you want and we can give second reading to the farm credit bill and have it sent to the committee." Instead we are today wasting the time of the House of Commons on an opposition day.

Paper legislation does not necessarily make good agricultural policy, good food policy or whatever you want to call it. Spokesmen for both the Conservative and New Democratic parties have indicated, Mr. Speaker, that everything was doom and gloom in the agriculture industry in Canada. I can tell the House, and I am sure a lot of hon. members are aware, that is not the situation in the agriculture industry. There are a lot of people who feel quite good about it.

Let me go down the list and talk about some of the producers that are making a decent net income today in agriculture. Egg producers are making a decent net income; poultry farmers raising broilers and turkeys are receiving a decent net income; pork producers are receiving a decent net income; and fluid milk and industrial milk provides a decent net income. These farmers have never been in a position where they have paid so much income tax in their lives before. They only pay income tax on net income, as they should, and they are happy about doing that.

Let us turn to the horticultural industry and find out what they are doing in that industry. I do not have the note here at the moment, but I will find it. The hon. member for Elgin knows very well that in Ontario there are about 20 some producers of horticultural commodities represented on their marketing board and I would challenge him to name just one of those who is not making a net profit. I say to the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn), who spoke on behalf of the New Democratic Party, name one of those people covered under a marketing board or a provincial association of some kind or another who is not making a net income. And that applies across Canada to all who belong to some kind of an agricultural organization.

The poorest group of all at the moment are the potato producers in Canada. They are suffering more than any. They are not in the same position all across Canada. In Alberta and Manitoba they are probably just about breaking even. However, in Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick the potato producers are losing money because they refuse to organize but instead accept that same old dilapidated marketing system they have always had.

Then the hon. member talked about the beef producers. There has been a bigger loss in that industry and he said we did nothing to prevent it. I suggest he look at the record. The

record shows that since August, 1974 we have had import controls almost constantly, with the exception of nine months in 1976. I was a bad fellow because I had import controls. Hon. members will recall that I got into trade wars and so on. I was told that was bad, that I should not get into a trade war with the United States, that great free trading nation to the south of us. The Canadian cattlemen charged in here with everything but their bulls, saying we must back off on this. Whenever I tried to do anything in cabinet, 29 telegrams were sent to my colleagues urging that I not be allowed to do that.

● (1552)

There is such disunity in the beef production industry today it is amazing that any producers are still active in that business. They did not want government to do anything until they got desperate. Then they made all kinds of requests. I can list four and a half pages of what we did in response to what they asked for, such as surcharges, payments and subsidy payments.

I stated at one time that I thought one of the surcharge programs with the United States and other oceanic countries shipping beef meant \$100 million to the producers of beef in Canada. The head of the Cattlemen's Association, the managing director or whatever he is called, wrote to me and said, of all things, "Mr. Minister, you are being too conservative." He said it meant a saving of over \$200 million in income advantage for the beef producers of Canada.

There are some beef producers in Canada who say they are still not making money. I have seen the books of some of them and they did not make that much in the last year. However, they are few and far between. Those in the cow-calf business are probably the ones who have suffered more than any other group. They have no other production entity to which they can turn. They cannot operate a complete finishing unit. These people were encouraged to get into the cow-calf operations by the provinces, which loaned them millions and millions of dollars. That was because there was going to be a great need for beef for a long time.

The hon. member for Brant stated that we increased the imports of beef into Canada this year. He knows we are a member of the Commonwealth and have trading agreements with its members. We are also a member of, and have signed trading agreements with, GATT.

Beef consumption increased by 4.4 per cent last year. Those countries that belong to the Commonwealth also belong to GATT. They could ask for a 4.4 per cent increase in exports to this country. We did not give it to them. They could ask for compensation from GATT and we would then have to pay that compensation. We would fight it as hard as we could.

Are we going to live in the international trading world or are we going to disappear from it? What do members opposite want us to do? If they want us to break away from the Commonwealth and GATT, let them say so.

The hon. member also talked about farm machinery. I wish to put some facts on the record. Farm implement sales dropped by an estimated 4 per cent in value last year. Quebec, however,