

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

**AGRICULTURE****DROUGHT IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO**

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture but in his absence I will address it to the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds.

Southwestern Ontario is facing the worst drought in some 50 years. For example, corn producers have already lost 20 per cent of their crop worth over \$200 million. Every day the drought continues it amounts to some \$20 million of additional loss to farmers. By the end of this month if the drought continues it is estimated that the losses will approach \$800 million. Losses are similar in other field and fruit and vegetable crops. I wonder what action the Government is taking in the face of this worst drought for farmers in southwestern Ontario in a generation.

● (1420)

**Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)):** Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the situation. The Hon. Member did not mention that there was a frost in parts of Ontario as recently as about 10 days ago that has also caused problems. We have been monitoring the weather situation, and particularly moisture, going back to the beginning of February. We are doing the same thing in Ontario as we are doing on the Prairies.

We have meetings planned with the respective farm organizations regionally for the end of this month or the beginning of next month so that we can get a good assessment of the situation. I think the Hon. Member would know, as an agriculture critic, that some of the crops are not beyond help yet as far as rain is concerned, and the reason we have scheduled the meetings with the farmers and farm groups in about a month's time is because we think that at that time we will be in a much better position to assess exactly what the situation is, and on that basis be able to determine what kind of assistance will be needed.

If the Hon. Member wants to be fair about this, he will recognize that this Government has been very responsive when dealing with farmers' problems, whether they be weather related, market related or whatever. We have been very much on top of it and have been very willing to provide assistance to farmers. We will do the same thing in this case.

**CROP INSURANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, over a year ago the Canada-Ontario Crop Insurance Review Committee reported to the Minister of Agriculture recommending, for instance, that benefits be increased from 80 per cent to 90 per cent. Corn producers have asked that the compensation level be increased by 50 per cent this year. The Ontario Government has offered to put in place a tripartite system which would provide additional benefits. The Minister of Agriculture has apparently told the Ontario Government, "We will take your cash but we won't increase the benefits".

I wonder why the Government has failed to act on those recommendations made over a year ago in a booklet entitled *Looking Ahead Toward 1988*. In fact, those recommendations which were made by that federal-provincial review committee were designed for exactly the kind of disaster we face today. Yet no action has been taken. The Government has been sitting on the report and has done nothing for over a year.

[Translation]

**Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of State (Agriculture)):** Mr. Speaker, I think that the Member for Algoma should know that our Government has done everything in its power to assist Canadian farmers and that we are at the present time reviewing all of our programs with regard to grain throughout Canada. My colleague the Minister responsible for grains, the Minister of Agriculture and myself will be holding consultations in all regions of the country in the course of the next few weeks. We will meet with all interested parties to see how the present structure in the grain sector could be modified to advantage. We have stood up for Canadian farmers, and invested more in their well-being than any previous Government. I have no doubt that we shall continue to do so and we will ensure that grain sector programs in Ontario and the rest of Canada match the needs of producers as closely as possible.

[English]

**CROP INSURANCE—REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, we know that the Government was able to come up with \$164 million for what was almost a political disaster in Lac-Saint-Jean last month, while a natural disaster in western Canada got only \$76 million.

Since the Government has failed to act for a year to put in place better crop insurance programs, and thus the participation rate has been very low because the present program is simply no good, and since the Government did not act on the recommendations of the committee, will the Government extend the deadline so that farmers can apply for crop insurance up until at least the end of August? This will provide some assistance from the Government to help them face the worst natural disaster they have faced in over 50 years.

[Translation]

**Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of State (Agriculture)):** Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago we announced that the Government would allot \$153 million to aid western producers. We clearly indicated that we were monitoring the situation very closely in Ontario and in Quebec, and indeed everywhere in Canada. We are currently in touch with Mr. Riddell who toured Southern Ontario to gain first-hand knowledge of the drought situation in that area and we hope that if we have to intervene the Government of Ontario will be as receptive as were the Governments of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, who provided us with exceptional co-operation in the application of a program in the prairie provinces. And we hope that in this case the Government of Ontario will co-operate closely with us in the application of a program to meet . . .