

Oral Questions

• (1140)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

At a time when western Canadian farmers are experiencing some of the lowest prices in agricultural history, it would seem appropriate that the federal government would want to do everything in its power to assist farm families struggling to survive.

It is ironic that the federal government is intent in doing just the opposite. Farmers were deeply shocked at the recent announcement that 10 per cent of the Crow benefit will be eliminated. It will take \$40 million out of Saskatchewan farmers' pockets alone at a time when they can least afford it.

Can the minister explain how this government can justify adding yet another additional blow to the economic and human suffering of western Canadian farm families?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, in the economic plan that was put forward by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, there was a reduction in expenditures of some \$8 billion. There were reductions in every area, in grants and contributions, of 10 per cent.

Those reductions will apply in the agriculture sector. It is a very difficult thing for governments to do, but the necessity of reducing those expenditures has to be shared with every one.

One thing the hon. member should understand is that the farm safety nets, GRIP and NISA, cash flow enhancements have been left intact and will be there to continue to assist the agriculture sector across Canada.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, this government knows that just as it has destroyed the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland, it is doing the same with agriculture producers in rural Canada.

For example, there has been a lot of concern over the impact of the export enhancement program which the United States has been using to force its way into traditional Canadian markets and the failure of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement to properly protect Canadians farmers in this area.

I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister this. We all know that the Liberals have completely caved in with their opposition to the free trade agreement with Mexico and the U.S.. Why has this government caved in on the Crow benefit, while at the same time signing the NAFTA agreement that will allow the United States to raid traditional Canadians markets with its destructive export enhancement program?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has to realize that there are some facts that he cannot dispute, that agricultural trade with the United States has increased 30 per cent since the signing of the free trade agreement with the United States. That puts benefit in his constituency, mine and every agricultural constituency in Canada.

The hon. member also has to recognize that there are new realities in agriculture, value added, sustainability and the ability to develop. His colleague in the province of Saskatchewan, the minister of economic development, continues to talk about it.

If the New Democratic Party wishes to assist agriculture in Canada, there are two things it can do. It can pass the farm credit legislation that allows all rural Canada to take advantage of farm credit legislation. Also, it can pass the check-off legislation that the farm community wants so that they are able to support themselves with check-offs and enter into this new real world.

The farm community, the agricultural sector of our economy, wants to do that. They want to go ahead. Will the New Democratic Party help them?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think we have to go on. The hon. member for York North.

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UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance, the only person left in Canada who thinks that the recession is over.

The unemployment statistics released today are further evidence that we face a serious national employment crisis. The unemployment rate now stands at 11.8 per cent, which means that almost 1.7 million Canadians are unemployed. The minister must admit that the reason why these people are unemployed is because his