

Cash Assurance Program

trend has not been reversed since that time. As we know, there is not much prime agricultural land that can be developed in this country. Most of it is very marginal.

The report goes on to say that 1974 was the first time in our history that we imported more food than we sold abroad, of course excepting grain. Being a farm person yourself, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you know that crop yields in this country which had been increasing for years, indeed for generations, at an average of about 2 per cent a year, began to level off. There are many reasons for this. One reason is that good quality farmland is diminishing. Another reason is the quality of the soil. It is diminishing very rapidly in this country. I refer you to the Rennie report in Saskatchewan which talked about the decreasing quality of the soil due to erosion by wind, water, chemical fertilizer we put on the soil, improper crop use, improper crop rotation and the like.

We are producing less and less food. The quality of soil is diminishing in this country. One need only look at the province of Ontario. The Conservative government of Ontario has to be tried and found guilty for tremendous lack of foresight in planning food production. All kinds of prime farmland in the Niagara peninsula have been paved over for industrial expansion and the building of highways.

When you build a highway through prime farmland it is not only the four-lane highway but the service stations, industrialization, and housing projects that are located along that highway. There are tens of thousands of acres of farmland that are paved over that used to be prime farmland. They will never again be used for production of food for this country or other parts of the world. That is not only happening in Ontario but across the world.

I will give a statistic that is absolutely scandalous. In the province of Ontario they have lost more than one million hectares of prime agricultural land in the sixties. It has gone under pavement, concrete, subdivisions, and industrial factories in the province of Ontario. In 1976 some 3.6 per cent of the entire prime farmland of Ontario went out of production.

Despite all of this, only two provinces in Canada have tough legislation to protect and preserve farmland for the production of food. In 1975 or 1976 British Columbia passed such a piece of legislation. The province of Quebec just recently introduced legislation—

[*Translation*]

—if I remember well, during the past two or three months, to protect farm land for food production in the province of Quebec.

[*English*]

We should have a land use policy right across this country. I know that land use is primarily under provincial jurisdiction, but there are ways whereby the federal government could devise a cost-sharing program with the provinces. There is federal land in this country, and federal projects built on prime farmland that could be built elsewhere.

I hope the Minister of Agriculture will have a good talk with some of his officials and become concerned about land use and

[Mr. Nystrom.]

food production. If not, then we as a large country with few people and immense potential will be importing food from other countries when the whole world is having a problem in food production.

I refer to a recent United Nations study by the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome. It states that in a few years we will have an immense crisis in the world because of a shortage of food, and that this year the people of the world will consume more food than we produce. In order to do that, we will have to dip into our reserve supplies which have been set up for emergencies.

It would be scandalous and a national disgrace if a wealthy country like Canada could not feed its own people. One way of feeding our own would be to pick up some of the ideas in the resolution now before us to stabilize farm income properly. If farmers are properly paid, they will produce. We know they are very productive. However, that by itself will not be enough. We need orderly marketing.

My friend from Ontario talked about chickens being imported into this country. Prior to 1974, 99 per cent of the chickens consumed here were raised in Canada. After 1981, 6.3 per cent of our chickens will come from the United States, despite the fact that we have the potential in this country to produce all we need. That is only one example. Food scientists and experts in the Department of Agriculture could give us many more.

I make the appeal that this resolution be allowed to go through the House so that we think of the problems in the long term. I refer to food production in this country. Let us be self-sufficient. Let us be sure we have the potential in this country to help those in other lands who cannot produce enough food. A wealthy industrialized state like Canada should not be importing food from poorer countries which should be using their prime agricultural land to feed their own.

I hope members on all sides will put pressure on the government to do something about what could be a real scandal in the years ahead. It could make the energy crisis look like a Sunday school picnic by comparison. There is nothing more serious than not having enough food. To have people dying of starvation is a real disgrace when we consider our capacity, brilliance, and technology.

I apologize for taking so long, Mr. Speaker. I hope we can still hear from the two members I mentioned at the outset of my remarks.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I will not take more than a few minutes so that my colleague from Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave) will have a chance to speak and the motion will carry because it has some very important aspects. That is why I want to give my most sincere support to my colleague from Mackenzie whom I have known for many years. I have seen him, when he was on the opposition side,