

*Government Orders*

Unfortunately, in its first term of government the Progressive Conservative Party chose not to move on that front. I think, without violating my native sense of modesty, the New Democrats did the farm community a real service in the last election by actually pinpointing, or at least suggesting, a particular program, a specific program, the Farm Family Support Program, which detailed a program for family farmers and forced a debate to occur on the whole question of a permanent safety net program.

I think it was a very good program. Certainly in Saskatchewan it was very well received. Saskatchewan farmers, as a result of that in large part, returned a large number of NDP members to this House this session.

There were a few aspects of that proposal that were particularly noteworthy in this context. One is that it set a basic support level at the cost of production, which this year would be about \$5.28 per bushel as opposed to the \$4.15 which the government is proposing under the GRIP legislation.

Second, the payment was payable at the elevator. You did not have to mail anything in, it did not depend on some announcement down the road, it was there at the elevator, it was part of the cheque when the farmer delivered his grain.

Third, there was a cap on the program which permitted the program to be premium-free for the first 8,000 bushels. There would be premiums above that, but it had the cap on the program so that the maximum amount of money went to the maximum amount of farmers, and therefore achieved the objective of keeping family farmers on the land.

The process was obviously continued by the Growing Together strategy, which I think resulted from some of the political pressure that had been created by the NDP in debating this particular proposal, as well as other farm groups. A consultation process ensued that had several stages, and certainly I want to give credit to the people who were involved in that. There were a lot of sincere people who put a lot of effort into it, and I think in some measure their voices were in fact heard.

However, in the last round of meetings that occurred in the farm community, and is still occurring, there was also a great deal of uncertainty about these programs. Farmers flocked to them in huge numbers. There must have been thousands of farmers who attended GRIP and NISA meetings in the last several months. They were

very curious. Over all, people recognized that there needs to be a program, that this at least offered some potential of a permanent, effective safety net program.

However, they were also very skeptical about some aspects of it. They were trying to take an objective look. Some of the problems that people identified are, I think, worth making note of again. One thing is that there is no relationship to the cost of production in the formula, and that it uses the 15-year rolling average to determine the level of farm support.

As one farmer, Lloyd Johnson from Turtleford, wrote in a communication: "What GRIP does in effect is guarantee 70 per cent of a market price that everyone already knows is too low to maintain the farming community."

That is true. If you look over the last 15 years, we have been steadily losing farmers, and to establish a payment level at 70 per cent of that obviously dooms us for some time to come.

Second, this is not a national program. It depends on individual agreements with specific provinces. Therefore, you get a situation where Saskatchewan residents pay \$168 per capita, Quebec \$21, and Ontario \$30; certainly not a national program.

Third, it discourages forage, crop rotation and reforestation on marginal lands.

Fourth, it creates more uncertainty because the temptation is going to be to sign up for the program and then withdraw because the rolling average will create falling benefits. This will put the plan in trouble. As Roy Romanow, Leader of the NDP in Saskatchewan said: "It might well be the shortest long-term program in history."

NISA helps those most who need it least.

The last aspect I would like to refer to is the third line of defence. We have a serious problem this spring. Certainly in that regard we appreciated the \$158 million announcement that we heard earlier today, but there is still uncertainty about the rest of the third line of defence. There is a suggestion that it will be tied closely to GRIP and NISA. That is unfair to farmers because the details of those programs are not fully known. Those farmers need that commitment now. The government promised that it would make known to farmers before spring seeding what this payment would be. It is time to do it now.