

Oral Questions

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member go back to his own riding and talk to the people in Gaultois—

Mr. Simmons: I did, two days ago.

Mr. Valcourt: —and ask them if this is what we are doing. We have introduced measures in Atlantic Canada to help these communities and these people. The difference is that this government will not impose anything on these people. We will get them to be the architects of their own development by participating in it. We are going to be helpful, that is what we are going to do.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture. It is almost a month now since the minister announced an aid program both for western farmers and farmers right across the country who are facing serious financial difficulties. Saskatchewan farmers face an 87 per cent reduction in net farm income this year. Seeding is about to begin in many parts of the prairies. I wonder why the government has set up such a complicated formula for getting assistance to these farmers in such a cynical way. Why has the government set up a formula which is not getting the money to the farmers now when they need it?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, of course we are eager to get assistance into the hands of the farmers, particularly for seeding time. The hon. member might do well to encourage his friends in the provincial governments across the country to join with the federal government in putting together a comprehensive program because that has been our style.

We have been working very closely, because agriculture is a shared responsibility between the two levels of government, and that is indicative of a process that we are going through in terms of a very comprehensive review in respect of agriculture policies in the future.

Our five-point program is on the table, \$500 million is there, and we are asking the provinces to help in the process to provide this kind of interim support that our

farmers need at this particular time so they can get their crops into the ground.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, surely enough the minister has put the money on the table. The problem is that many provinces cannot afford to match those funds. The money is desperately needed, not in July, not in September, not in November, it is needed now.

Is the minister prepared to pay out that money from the federal government right now because it is needed for the seeding across the west and in other parts of the country, without waiting until the provinces work out a very complicated process?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that progress is being made. It is not all negative as the hon. member suggests. Discussions are going on at the official level and at the ministerial level.

It is interesting to note that some of the provinces are coming through with balanced budgets. I think the hon. member may want to reflect on whether they have the ability to support. If agriculture is important to the provinces such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and others, then they should be in a position to support it as we have and as we are as a federal government that has stood behind the farmers in good times and bad times. We are there today and we will be there tomorrow.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Saskatoon—Humboldt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. In addition to the problems which my colleague from Algoma has put before the minister, the minister has been quick to tell the farmers that there were three very recent hikes in Farm Credit Corporation interest. The farmers are still waiting for any kind of word as to when they will receive the federal funds in this emergency program.

Can the minister tell us if he has reached any agreement with any of the provinces and when will those cheques be in the hands of the farmers?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the discussions are ongoing and a number of the provinces have indicated a willingness to participate with the federal government. We have indicated, in turn, that we would be very