

Supply

Revenue, that tax audits continue to be an active part of the program of the Department of National Revenue with respect to farmers, even though those farmers face what the Minister himself says is an unprecedented situation.

We have a set of debt review boards established. Yet those debt review boards do not have within them the capacity to actually work out solutions which would lead to the potential write-downs of some debt or a potential packaging of combinations of debts with the FCC and with individual banks. There has not been given to these debt review boards that kind of power, despite the urgent necessity for that kind of capacity in order to intervene in the debt situation which exists for many farmers throughout this country.

We have to recognize that the debt situation of farmers as it stands in 1988 is at the heart of many of their difficulties. That debt situation is not something which was caused by them. It was something which was established by a foolish decision of the previous Government to permit interest rates to rise to absolutely ridiculous levels, and because the banks imposed this rise in interest rates on those farmers who had taken out loans with them. That is eating up much of the support being provided through this first and second round of deficiency payments which have been allocated and which are being discussed here today.

We have to raise very serious questions. Why the lack of a comprehensive approach? Why is there a lack of a broad strategy? Why is there this continual last minute recourse to *ad hoc* situations and *ad hoc* support, which is necessary and which we have called for, but which does not satisfactorily deal with the basic problems with which the farm sector is faced?

I have to say also, as a representative of one of two counties in Ontario which produce the bulk of soybeans, that the derisory one cent allocation for soybean producers is something which has hurt the Government far worse than had it decided to simply leave soybeans out of the program entirely. I would not, of course, recommend that. Instead, I would recommend a support for soybeans which would provide some kind of equitable recognition of the cost of production after stabilization payments have been taken into account. That would give a fair return to soybeans in comparison with corn and wheat which, in my part of Ontario, is very often grown together, as is the case in Kent County as well. That inequity simply has to be addressed by the Government in the Bill it will eventually bring in and the regulations which that Bill will permit to be established.

I would like to conclude by saying that all of us who represent, at least in part, farm constituencies, recognize that the problem farmers face is not an easy problem. It is a problem which requires action at the national level, at the international level and at the provincial level. But we also have to see the urgency of this problem as something that pushes us to try to deal with it in a much more comprehensive way and, therefore, in a much more serious way. Farmers are, of course, thankful for the *ad hoc* support, but they are not thankful for

the delays with respect to announcements of programs. They are not thankful for the inequities which affect a commodity such as soybeans. They are not thankful for the failure of the Government to do what it said it would do before it was elected, that is, to establish a comprehensive and effective program to put the family farm back on a firm basis.

• (1210)

Certainly, as far as my part of Ontario is concerned, and as far as much of western Canada is concerned, the family farm is still very much at threat. Part of the reason for this is due to international programs and the policies of the United States. However, another part of it, too, has to do with the fact that the Government has not adopted a strategy. It has not tried to make a strategy to deal with the problems that face farmers, in particular, the debt problem which is something that represents a large failure on the part of the Government. It is something that farmers will recognize and pay back in terms of support for other alternatives in the coming election.

I believe that if the New Democratic Party were to form the next Government, we would adopt such a comprehensive policy. However, I hope that whatever Party forms the Government it will have a comprehensive across-the-board strategy to deal with the whole set of problems which farmers have been facing. That would be better than the continual *ad hoc*, last minute and, for that reason, unsatisfactory approach to the problem which farmers face.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Chairman, I wish to take this opportunity to say a few words about the matter that is before us today, particularly since I come from Manitoba, a province in which agriculture plays such a major economic role. While I represent an urban area, I feel that most Manitobans have a direct and vital interest in agriculture. I hope that by contributing to this debate we can light a fire under the Government to increase its sense of urgency with regard to agricultural problems.

I wish to say right off the mark that I feel that the Government has failed the test of leadership when it comes to facing agricultural problems and when it comes to resolving the crises that are facing farmers today. Let me be clear that today in the House we are facilitating the Government's efforts to make a payment of \$800 million under this special agricultural program.

In terms of the over-all picture of the crisis that is facing agriculture I want to say something about the Government's responsibilities and its failure to meet the test of leadership.

What types of problems are farmers facing today? What situation do we find in agricultural Canada? What type of a situation do we find among grain producers? The situation is at a crisis point. It is critical. If we were talking about a patient in the hospital we would be talking about life and death. This is a situation which requires not cosmetic surgery but immediate and radical surgery in order to bring the patient back to health.