

Farm Loans Interest Rebate Act

community to the bone. The Members of the Government will, no doubt, offer the argument that, like any other businessman, the farmer experiences periods of growth and periods of recession, periods of prosperity and periods of stagnation. He must weather the storms of financial distress, just like any other business person.

However, this is not just any industry. This is the food supply of our country. For this very reason I feel that the farmer should not have to face this kind of interest burden. I emphasize that these benefits should apply only to the career farmer. I am not talking about the speculator who is out to make a quick dollar, or the gentleman farmer who grazes a few race horses for his amusement. I am talking about the hardworking family farmer who has worked hard to maintain the equity in his farm and has done his best to run an efficient operation.

Another important difference between farming operations and other businesses is this: the farmer must maintain, in order to be efficient during the rush periods of the year, a fleet of equipment, which is often worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. This equipment often lays idle for ten months of the year, but if it is not there during the critical period, the owner stands to lose a great deal of money. In order to purchase and maintain such a fleet of equipment, the farmer must have a great deal of capital.

On Saturday night I attended a dinner in West Lincoln, in my riding of Erie. I sat beside a farmer who told me the story of a farmer who lives right next to him. He put in a crop of soybeans. He depends upon a custom harvester to harvest his crop. It was a wet fall, and when there was a couple of days of dry weather, the harvester was not available because it was working on other farms. The farmer lost that entire soybean crop. Unlike the manufacturer who can use his machinery 24 hours a day and seven days a week if he wishes, the farmer only uses his machinery profitably a very small percentage of the time. Therefore, a comparison between farming and industry in terms of eligibility for financial assistance is like comparing apples and oranges.

The last point I should like to make is that many Canadians are reaching retirement age. In the next ten to 15 years, many of these people will move into their little apartments in town. What will happen to the land which they are working now? Which would you rather see, a generation of young, ambitious farmers willing to toil to develop efficient and profitable enterprises, living in small, close-knit communities that are economically self-sustaining, or giant corporations complete with efficiency experts and an army of accountants promoting cost-saving policies at the expense of aesthetic and sociological considerations? Unless this Government recognizes the value of the family farm and plans its assistance programs accordingly, farm communities as we know them will disappear, and we will have acres and acres of fenceless, levelled land which can be efficiently farmed with huge machinery owned only by giant corporations. Instead of living on the land, workers will come from afar to drive equipment at an hourly wage. I am sure that the Members of this House would like to see the

tradition of the family farm continued. Like home ownership, however, this dream is rapidly disappearing. The family farm cannot continue to exist without effective financial assistance being given to the young farmers.

To some degree I applaud Bill C-134 for its attempt to focus upon this genuine problem. However, as I have already stated, the program does not go far enough and does not help enough people. Perhaps the intentions are good, but we have to enlarge the scope of this Bill. Certainly, by doing this, we can help to ensure the continuation of a healthy, people-centered agricultural industry in this country in the years to come.

Mrs. Jennifer Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and a deep sense of honour that I stand here today in the House of Commons as the newly elected representative for Leeds-Grenville to speak out on matters that are of great concern not only to my riding but also to Canada.

Hon. Members from all sides of the House are already familiar with the riding of Leeds-Grenville because of its close proximity to Ottawa. It is one of the most beautiful and picturesque ridings in this part of the country. The Rideau Canal system, of which we are all very proud, celebrated its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary this year, and all along its banks it provides many peaceful rest havens for retirees and weekend hideaways for many of the Ottawa area and local residents.

Brockville, the only city in my riding, borders on the St. Lawrence River and also celebrated its sesquicentennial this year, attracting many distinguished visitors. Leeds-Grenville is very much at home amid the lovely Thousand Islands, and Gananoque, a small town nestled in the southwest end of the riding, is in the midst of this scenic wonder. It is not very difficult to realize that there is tremendous tourism potential in that area that should be expanded to its fullest to promote much needed employment and bring in additional revenues through which the economy can grow and develop.

● (1740)

All along the St. Lawrence River there is a great industrial base, which unfortunately has been dealt some stiff blows in recent years because of the faltering economy with which the Government has not come to grips. Every week I am made aware of the fact that somewhere in the riding 20 or 30 people have been let go from their jobs, and while this may not sound too significant in itself, these numbers added together over months and months become increasingly significant, and we begin referring to hundreds of people who have lost their jobs.

Brockville alone has suffered major lay-offs in the last few months, and unemployment has increased 35 per cent since last year. Prescott, a small town east of Brockville, has been the hardest hit by unemployment and must resort to work-sharing programs to keep its people employed. Here, unemployment has increased more than 50 per cent over the same period last year. Gananoque, its major industry being tourism, suffers appreciably during the winter months and has also had