

Government Orders

briefs, he would fail to bring to light a single witness, other than the minister, who calls this change "equitable".

Even the governments of Ontario, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia and New Brunswick found that it is far less than equitable. Seven out of the nine producer witnesses asked for a tripartite sharing of the costs of crop insurance. The list of witnesses was very impressive, witnesses who were asking for an amendment to change the funding for the crop insurance program to a one-third, one-third, one-third split.

We have the Ontario Agriculture Commodity Council that represents 17 different producer groups. The Soybean Growers' Marketing Board of Ontario was present. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities made a brief. The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, the Western Barley Growers' Association, the Ontario Seed Growers' Association, and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, all these organizations that came before the committee recognized an equitable sharing of the premium would be one divided along the line of one-third, one-third, one-third.

Only the minister and his department's witnesses agreed with the proposed format. I suggest that only this government could possibly argue that this legislation would implement an equitable sharing arrangement.

I should point out, perhaps, that when the National Farmers Union appeared before the committee it asked for a one-third, two-thirds sharing of the split, with the federal government accepting the two-thirds share.

In December, I argued for the precedent of the tripartite cost sharing to be established in crop insurance. I would like to point out today with this legislation that the government is clearly attempting to undermine that precedent and to set a new precedent for cost sharing and programs to provide the rationale to reverse these previous decisions.

I would like to take a few moments to point out some of the other weaknesses of this legislation to show how some of them are directly related to this legislation's failure to introduce equitable cost sharing. The coverage under this bill would improve from 80 per cent to 90 per cent for some crops. That may seem like an improve-

ment that the legislation would make for crop insurance. However, on a field of corn, this 10 per cent improvement would cost the farmer almost double the premium. The farmer's insurance premium costs would go from \$5.71 an acre to \$10 per acre. Common sense alone should tell the government that this is far from balanced, or is very inequitable to say the least.

Look at what happens to a Saskatchewan farmer. Let us say that he has 1,200 acres of wheat with a coverage of 70 per cent, guaranteeing him returns of 18 bushels an acre. His premium would be \$5,700. To increase that coverage from 70 per cent to 80 per cent, a 10 per cent increase in coverage, his premium would increase by 75 per cent—a 75 per cent cost for a 10 per cent return. That is far from being equitable. I am reasonably sure that very few farmers will be opting for that additional coverage, because of the extra cost.

Considering the administrative difficulties and the gross inequities revealed by the application of the Canadian Drought Assistance Program, I would have thought that the government would have attempted to address these problems in this legislation. I have to refer to the fact that it has been recommended by various groups that we should have more coverage that is available for individual farms. For example in my own riding, producers in Ekfrid, Metcalfe, and Adelaide townships were able to establish a long narrow drought band cutting a swath across their townships. The area of the band in total was fairly large. Because the majority of the three townships in question was not as hard hit, the whole township was ruled ineligible for drought assistance. Because of the guidelines the appeal process failed to rectify the situation. If the intent of the legislation is truly and actually to reform crop insurance, we should have included changes that would allow for damage assessments such as this and make recommendations for future years, such as we had in 1987 and 1988, and in some areas in 1989.

• (1830)

I would like to speak of tomorrow. A few moments ago I referred to the fact that spring is almost here. It is here officially on March 21. In my area, seeding will start around April 1.