

Crop Insurance Act

be able to make a living or get any revenue from their land. I congratulate the government in this regard.

This crop insurance plan was initiated some 10 or 11 years ago. With the knowledge we have gained since then, we can take a closer look at the situation and perhaps come up with amendments which will make it possible for a greater number of farmers to participate. I was surprised when I first looked up the records to find that only 53,000 farmers in the whole of Canada participated in the crop insurance program.

I think everyone agrees with the principle of insurance in one form or another. Very few people would go without fire insurance and the like. Similarly, when it comes to a question of personal income, and where livelihood is derived from farming, an insurance program is extremely important. No one will argue against the need for crop insurance legislation. Promotion of this program has been lax. Not enough initiative has been taken by the federal or provincial governments. These governments should do a great deal more to sell this idea to the farmers.

May I call it one o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. It being one o'clock I do now leave the Chair. The House will meet again at two o'clock.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Korchinski: Mr. Speaker, before we rose at one o'clock, I was trying to point out that even though the crop insurance legislation has been in effect for over ten years there have been relatively few farmers in Canada who have participated. I realize that in the initial stage it was necessary that one should gain some experience in this respect. At that time, some provincial governments were reluctant to enter a plan in respect of which they had no experience. I well remember some of the arguments that were raised. Some suggestion was made that perhaps a provincial government could become bankrupt if there should be a series of crop failures in a particular province. Since then, amendments have been introduced whereby loans could be provided to provinces. I believe this, to some extent, has eliminated that particular criticism.

Before I venture too far into some of the remarks I wish to make, I might raise a question with which either the Parliamentary Secretary or someone else speaking in reply might like to deal. I refer to the matter of whether this particular amendment would require that the same rules which had been in existence before would apply or whether the total amount of flooded land might be considered separately from other cultivated land in calculating any award to farmers who have crop insurance.

• (2:10 p.m.)

When the plan was first introduced, there was a fair amount of enthusiasm in many provinces. Perhaps this was enthusiasm from people who were willing to learn about schemes with which they were not too familiar. On looking back at some of the annual reports on the province of Saskatchewan for the year 1961, one finds there were around 118 municipalities which indicated that they wanted a study carried out in their municipalities to see whether a particular plan might not work in their area.

Of course, in its infancy the administration was not capable of coping with some of these problems because naturally the staff was inexperienced and inadequate. In addition, they only had a limited time during which to solve these problems. In subsequent years, such as in 1961, many farmers in western Canada would have gladly participated in the program because the awards that would have been made would have helped to stave off the slump in the economy of western Canada at that time and might have tided us over.

We have had similar experiences in other years. Three years ago we had a severe frost, particularly in the northern part of Saskatchewan. This was another time when I saw completely frozen crops. Following that year, the Saskatchewan pool invited representatives from all parties to attend their meetings. At that time members of all parties in the House had an opportunity to visit some of these areas which could have had a tremendous 40 million bushel crop. There was every appearance of a good crop; the stand was big, the heads appeared to be well formed, but when you shelled them out you found they were frozen in the flower stage. Insurance in this case would have proved of enormous benefit.

After 10 or 11 years we find that, despite all that can be said for crop insurance, only a small percentage of farmers in Canada have taken advantage of it. Either the Parliamentary Secretary or the hon. member for Saskatchewan-Biggar (Mr. Gleave) indicated that some 12,000 farmers in Saskatchewan had participated. He based his comments on the report that is available. I checked the number of farmers who participated last year, and I find that there was a decrease of some 3,000 in Saskatchewan. I think that perhaps there may be a reason for this decline. Last year was a particularly critical year financially in western Canada. Many farmers were cutting down on expenses wherever they could. For example, they cut down on fertilizers or on insurance. Perhaps this was not wise, but it enabled them to carry on their farming operation. As a result of the lack of cash in western Canada last year, there was a drop from the 12,000 farmers who participated the previous year to 9,000 last year. If this is a continuing trend, I imagine we will be struggling hard to get them back.

In addition to the fact that there were fewer farmers participating—a decrease of 25 per cent from those who participated the previous year—another factor must be taken into consideration. Among the farmers who had participated in the scheme by making a payment of