

The largest amount of unharvested crop is in Alberta where approximately 5,635,000 acres of wheat, oats, barley and rye remain standing or in the swath, and an additional 435,000 acres of flax and 375,000 acres of rapeseed have yet to be harvested.

In Saskatchewan there are some 3,000,000 acres remaining to be harvested while in Manitoba there are about 350,000 acres still to be threshed. In total some 10,000,000 acres of western crops may remain in the fields over winter to be harvested in the spring.

It is estimated that some 25,000 farmers have been affected by the inclement weather conditions and as a result find themselves in financial difficulties. Many of these farmers would now be entitled to assistance under the PFAA crop insurance and advance payments programs had they been able to harvest their crop in a normal manner.

To meet this condition the government therefore proposes to take the following steps to accelerate the provision of assistance to farmers in western Canada with unthreshed crops:

1. In areas where in the opinion of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act administration potential yields of unthreshed crops are such that producers would qualify for some measure of assistance regardless of a possible spring harvest, there will be an assessment of possible yields and interim payments made to those who qualify for same. These payments will be subject to final adjustment after harvest is completed in the spring.

2. The Department of Agriculture, through the Prairie Farm Assistance administration, will maintain a close liaison with provincial crop insurance administrators with a view to providing interim indemnity payments to farmers whose potential yields are estimated to be such as will fall below insured levels when crops are threshed in the spring.

3. Legislation will be brought forward to provide for cash advances on unthreshed grain similar to those provided for with respect to threshed grain under the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, the minister was kind enough to hand me a copy of his remarks as I was coming into the House a few moments ago. May I at once say that in so far as the third suggestion is concerned regarding legislation to provide for cash advances on unthreshed grain similar to those provided for threshed grain under the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, it commands support.

Assistance to Western Grain Farmers

This is something that I and other members have pressed for, and I compliment the government for proceeding in this regard. It is something that is going to cover a present position of affairs that has required, as I have described it, emergency action in order to place money in the hands of the western farmers at the earliest possible date.

In regard to the first two steps proposed, in effect what will be done is that in those areas in which the yields may be anticipated to be such that they will qualify under one or more of the categories for payments under the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, then in co-operation with the authorities of PFAA and in close liaison with provincial crop authorities advances will be made of part of that to which, under ordinary circumstances, the individual would have become entitled.

These things are beneficial and will bring moneys into the hands of the western farmers at a time when, because of inability to sell our wheat abroad, sales are almost impossible for the average farmer except within the quota limitations, and then only provided there is space to store the grain.

● (11:20 a.m.)

This brings me to a suggestion that I should like to place before the minister as part of the general pattern. I refer to the need to assure western farmers that moneys required to harvest the remaining 375,000 acres of rapeseed will be forthcoming. As has been pointed out to the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang), when rapeseed is actually placed on the premises for cleaning it is not taking up space that should be available for wheat. I therefore find it difficult to understand why Canadian Northern Seeds Limited, a company which has been selling rapeseed abroad and has markets all over the world which in no way interferes with storage, has been denied the right to take rapeseed from thousands of farmers in Saskatchewan.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the order made by the Wheat Board is completely arbitrary, unjustified and should be repudiated. The Wheat Board might lose face as a result of a change but it would mean that tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of dollars would be available to the farmers of Saskatchewan who are producing rapeseed. It would gain markets abroad and bring in foreign exchange. Knowing the interest of the minister in agriculture, and I say that without any intention to flatter, I suggest to him that