

*Supply*

government have to get all of that information out to the producers. The long and the short of it is that the banking and the lending institutions have lost faith because of the way similar programs have been handled in the past with uncertainty and the producer thinking he was going to get a certain amount of money and then finding out later that he did not get that much or it was not coming. The lending institutions are saying: "Show me, then I will assist you in your financial arrangements for another crop year". But the producers cannot say, and they cannot show them, because all they say is that it is on the table. They want to know how they are going to get it in their hands, and they cannot. It is a very frustrating position.

The government is being told, and I wonder if it is listening, that by far the majority of Canadians recognize the importance of agriculture. By coincidence, today in my office I received a letter from a lady in my riding who I believe was born on a farm but who has not lived on the farm in many years. This is from a lady in Prince Edward—Hastings riding, a long way from the Prairies, but I would like to read it:

I do not make it a practice to write to members of parliament, but I feel very strongly that I should do so. I am quite concerned about our western farmers, feeling that they need more help that our government seems willing to give them. The price of wheat is very low and should be subsidized so that farmers will get a fair price. I am sure that they had expected a fair price and were dependent on that to keep going. The farming industry is one of Canada's most important industries, if not the *most* important! I would hate to see any more farmers having to leave the land because they cannot make a go of it!

We should listen to that. I hope the government listens to that.

We have seen a high interest rate policy and a weak negotiating ability at the negotiating table, as far as agriculture is concerned. It is very nice to be a nice guy, but I can tell you from experience in negotiating that the nice guy does not always win. I do not mean to say that one has to be belligerent or nasty when negotiating, but the friendly approach does not always succeed. It is all well and good to come away from the negotiating table saying that we were nice and we showed the way, but when the other people at that table walk away saying that they got Canada again, it starts to concern me.

Grave concern has been expressed at the meetings in my riding in the last month over our negotiating ability and whether Canada is being firm enough in its negotiations. That inability to negotiate firmly and the low prices and the low yields as a result of weather conditions in parts of our country, including parts of the western provinces particularly with the shortage of rain and the drought, has placed the economic stability and sustainability of thousands of Canadian farmers in jeopardy.

We keep talking of sustainability in agriculture and sustainability in the environment and I feel that they go hand in hand. I do not think there is a group of people in Canada that understands the importance of the environment any greater than our farm community. They know what has to be done. They know what should be done and they know how to do it. However, with the prices and the returns to farmers at the present time that they cannot afford to do it.

We are all going to suffer and we had better soon wake up and realize that if we are going to have a sustainable environment, we will need sustainable agriculture, which in turn requires a sustainable economy. They go hand in hand.

I urge the government to put the policies in place that are necessary for that to happen. We have a great natural resource. We have a great food producing capacity, but I do not think we are paying enough attention to it. I do not think that we are marketing it properly. I do not think we are explaining to Canadians the importance of agriculture. I do not think the assistance that is given to farmers is adequate. First the government should explain how the way it is dealing with this particular industry is for the betterment and for the good of all Canadians.

There is no comprehensive agricultural or food producing policy in this country. There is work being done on it. I encourage the government to develop that policy quickly so that producers and farmers and therefore Canadian consumers know that we have a food security and an agricultural security program in this country.

• (1750)

**Mr. David Bjornson (Selkirk):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be asked to speak on behalf of the government on this particular issue.