

Supply

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the House today about the concerns of rural Canada and primarily the concerns of farmers in farm communities.

A number of my colleagues have already addressed the general problems of Canadian agriculture and have spoken of the specific problems being found in the horticultural industry and the grains and oilseeds sectors.

In addition, there has been an extensive discussion of the safety net program, the national GRIP and NISA programs and a third line of defence. Therefore, I want to confine my comments for the most part to Atlantic concerns, especially those relating to my home province of Prince Edward Island.

Prince Edward Island is basically a rural province. Its economy is driven by two main industries, the farming and fishing industries. The economic health of the whole province is heavily dependent upon the state of these two industries, both of which are our primary industries.

The policies of this government since 1984 have made it increasingly difficult for these two industries to survive, let alone grow. Further impediments have been placed in the way of primary producers in their attempt to make a decent living. For example, in the fishing sector we have been confronted by a refusal to make adequate repairs to wharfs and to keep harbours dredged. The government has forced our lobstermen to increase the carapace size, posing a further loss on their catches.

The dockside monitoring program has now been forced through. Fishermen throughout the whole gulf area have objected to this program and the way the costs are being passed on to them but all to no avail.

In the agricultural sector, we have been confronted by increased user fees, increased inspection fees, cuts in assistance programs, increased crop insurance fees and a cut of \$1.8 million over the past couple of years.

These types of policies have eroded the capability of our farmers and fishermen to make a decent living. When these policies and programs are combined with general weak economic conditions, recessionary in many parts of the world, with high costs of production, especially long-term high interest rates and with the increas-

ing levels of competition from foreign producers, Canadian farmers are in extremely difficult times.

Add to that, the subsidy wars between the United States and Europe, of which we are a casualty, and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the result is that our agriculture industry is seriously adrift.

At this point, I would like to deal with a problem which directly involves the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and, indirectly, any other province which depends on P.E.I. for their supply of seed potatoes. The potato industry has long been the lifeblood of our agricultural industry in Prince Edward Island.

It has often been said that potatoes are to P.E.I. what wheat is to Saskatchewan. The provincial minister of agriculture made this statement just last week. Given the importance of the potato to the economy of P.E.I., it is not difficult to understand the degree of potential economic devastation being faced by potato producers on the Island. In light of the discovery of the potato virus PVY-N and the ensuing embargoes imposed first by the state of Maine, then by the U.S. department of agriculture and then by the Government of Canada and the Government of Mexico, it has pretty well frozen out all seed potato exports to anywhere in North America.

When producers were informed last October that the virus had been discovered, there was considerable concern among producers whose crops were infected. This concern turned to shock in February when the USFDA imposed a total ban on the imports to that country which meant that even those producers who did not have the virus were unable to sell any of their seed potatoes.

A modification of this ban left only Prince Edward Island seriously affected. The province of New Brunswick, which had three incidences of disease, was cleared.

Right now the industry in P.E.I. is in turmoil and it is feared that many farmers will go out of business. A severe eradication program has been agreed upon. This was a necessary first step, although a bitter one to swallow. A compensation package is now being negotiated.

I sincerely hope, as do the producers and those in related industries in P.E.I., that this compensation package will be a just and equitable one, that it will be one which will keep our growers in business and allow them to rebuild P.E.I.'s reputation of being the producers of