

Supply

Madam Deputy Speaker: The period for questions and comments is over. We will resume debate. The hon. member for Essex—Windsor will be speaking for 10 minutes, which will be followed by a five minute period of question and comments.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Madam Speaker, I think it is especially useful, perhaps, to follow up the minister who has made some reference to the province of Ontario and the Government of Ontario's policy toward farmers. I think it is often forgotten that the very difficult situation facing farmers throughout this country is not confined to western Canada. In fact, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture this past summer declared what it called a state of emergency in Ontario agriculture.

• (1200)

It appeared before the agriculture committee along with the Ontario Corn Producers Association, the Ontario Soybean Growers Marketing Board, and the Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, all of the major agricultural groups in the province of Ontario and commodity groups affected in the province of Ontario. They presented an agreed-to statement that put things in very tough terms. They said the income situation for thousands of Ontario grain and oilseed producers is desperate. They said that statutory programs and interim measures announced on April 18 do not come close to providing "a transition from income levels attained during the pre GRIP-NISA period based on those expected with GRIP-NISA in future years for Ontario grain and oilseed farmers".

They go on to say that without immediate government action, thousands of Ontario family farms will simply not survive through 1991 to realize the promise of improved safety net programs. They will enter 1992 in such a weakened condition financially that no safety net program will be able to prevent their ultimate demise.

I know that the minister has had discussions with the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Roger George. I know that the president of the OFA has reported that the minister has taken a very hard line toward some of his cabinet colleagues, that the minister has said there has to be action with respect to what is taking place in the province of Ontario. I had very much hoped that this week the minister and the Minister of Agriculture would have had something to say to farmers

across the province of Ontario to give them some hope as we head into the winter because what we face is, as they have said, a desperate situation.

They have suggested various things that need to be done so that Ontario farmers are treated the same way as western farmers. They have suggested for instance that there needs to be a top-up of ASA support prices to the 95 per cent level. There needs to be interim payments issued on 1990-91 crop sales, as was done in early spring under the Western Grain Stabilization Act program. The estimated cost of that is \$36 billion.

They suggested that there has to be an incremental increase in the initial payment for 1991-92 Ontario wheat sales with an estimated benefit to Ontario farmers of something in excess of \$4.5 million.

These kinds of points are what they have stressed to the agriculture committee. They have also made requests to the Ontario government. They have made requests for an immediate interim payment under the Ontario Grain Stabilization Program, for the waiver of the one-third producer premium deduction with the Ontario program. They have also asked, if the federal government increases its ASA payments to the 95 per cent level, that the Ontario government agree to maintain its payments at the present level, which had been promised.

The minister suggested that the province of Ontario needs to take action. I want to tell the minister that this is a message which has gone to the Ontario government from members of all political parties, including myself. We have said to the Ontario government that this is not action that should just be the responsibility of the federal government.

The other side of that point is that this is not a desperate situation which can be dealt with only by the Ontario government. The federal government must provide part of the assistance to Ontario farmers.

That is the general situation in the province of Ontario. There is a special situation in my area. We face in southwestern Ontario, especially in Essex County, but also in Kent County, parts of Lambton County and parts of Elgin County, severe drought conditions this year. These drought conditions reflect the lowest levels of rainfall ever recorded in Essex County, for instance, in the month of July and just about the lowest levels that