

[Texte]

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Mr. Yewchuk: Am I to conclude that the Farm Credit Corporation consider loans from farmers who are already well established on the reserve? Is this what you are saying?

Mr. Bélanger: Yes. Well, they would have a certain experience and be established to a certain extent, Mr. Chairman, in the way they would normally do with a non-Indian farmer who has to have an equity. If an outside person has equity to put into a farming operation, obviously this is all that is required on the part of the Farm Credit Corporation. It is difficult to deal in generalities. The problem of the Indian person is that quite often he does not have that equity to start with, and if we can, through what I refer to as an infrastructure program, bring him to a level where we create this sufficient equity on his part after which he can then have access to normal sources of financing, that is the objective of our agricultural program.

Mr. Yewchuk: When you talk about viability, can you give me a little more information as to what you mean?

Mr. Bélanger: We in the department in the field of economic development define viability not in the normal business sense. Ours is an operation or an enterprise which generates enough revenue to meet its operating expenses and repay any debt charges it has assumed. When we look at a proposal, it is not necessarily one which will provide a return on investment though it can, mind you, and this definition is a much more restricted one, I think, than is normally used in the business world. In determining viability of any operation—economic enterprise, business enterprise—we consider only whether this enterprise is capable of generating enough revenue to meet its operating expenses and service its debt, nothing more.

Mr. Yewchuk: Let us take as an example a young Indian male of 25 who is intelligent and hard working and who, as is typical of 99 per cent of them, does not have any capital or equity but appears to be interested enough to become a good farmer. How do you go about making him into a farmer?

Mr. Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, obviously we are talking again somewhat in generalities. I do not have a specific case. Provided he had sufficient land to establish a viable operation he could be assisted through a grant, initially from us, to provide breaking and land clearing, and maybe with some basic equipment, and gradually it might take him over a year or two to get to a point where he could then have access to outside sources of financing.

We still finance quite a number of agricultural endeavours, Mr. Chairman, through our own funds. In fact we probably make up the bulk of the loans we have made throughout the years. On some 3,257 outstanding loans, 1,486 are for agricultural purposes—out of our own fund, that is. And I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, that I do not have the figures on the Farm Credit Corporation operations.

The Chairman: You will make those available to the Committee.

Mr. Bélanger: Yes, we can very readily make them available, Mr. Chairman.

[Interprétation]

M. Yewchuk: Dois-je en déduire que la Corporation du crédit agricole prend en considération des demandes de prêts qui lui viennent de cultivateurs déjà établis sur la réserve? C'est bien ce que vous dites?

M. Bélanger: Oui. S'ils ont une certaine expérience et que leur avenir semble bon, la Société leur accorde le même traitement qu'aux autres. Ce n'est qu'une question de garanties financières, en somme. C'est difficile de généraliser, mais le problème de l'Indien provient essentiellement d'un manque de capital. Le but de notre programme agricole est de l'aider, avec ce que j'appelle un programme d'infrastructure; il pourra se créer un certain capital et recourir éventuellement aux modes de financement déjà prévus.

M. Yewchuk: Qu'entendez-vous au juste par rentabilité?

M. Bélanger: Ce mot, pour nous, a un sens particulier. Nos revenus suffisent à couvrir nos dépenses courantes et à assurer les frais de nos emprunts ou dettes. Contrairement à ce qui se passe dans le secteur privé, nous ne tenons pas absolument à ce que nos placements rapportent un bénéfice, quoique cela arrive, remarquez; nous voulons seulement que l'emprunteur puisse payer les intérêts de la dette en plus de ses dépenses courantes. C'est là notre définition de la rentabilité.

M. Yewchuk: Prenons le cas d'un jeune Indien intelligent et travailleur d'environ 25 ans qui aimerait devenir cultivateur, mais qui, comme 99 p. cent de ses semblables, est sans le sou. Que pourriez-vous faire pour lui?

M. Bélanger: En principe, enfin on parle toujours en termes généraux, supposons que le jeune homme a un lopin de terre que nous considérons rentable. Nous pouvons lui accorder une subvention pour l'aider à le défricher et à acheter quelques outils essentiels; après un an ou deux il pourra recourir à un mode de financement en rapport avec sa situation.

C'est probablement là, d'ailleurs, que va le gros de notre argent. Sur environ 3,257 prêts non remboursés, il y en a 1,486 qui ont été accordés à ce titre. Je suis désolé, monsieur le président, mais je n'ai pas en mains les détails du rapport de la Corporation du crédit agricole à ce sujet.

Le président: Vous nous les ferez parvenir.

M. Bélanger: Avec plaisir.