

Crop Insurance Act

• (3:10 p.m.)

The PFAA should be amended. On one or two occasions I have tried to bring this to the attention of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson). I cannot recall the exact details, but it seems to me that in its 30 years of existence it has cost the government substantial amounts on only one or two occasions. Nearly always the 1 per cent levy has represented as much as the cost, so the cost to the federal treasury has been very little. If I recall correctly, the cost of administering crop insurance—which is carried out by the provincial governments with the assistance of the federal government—has been in the neighbourhood of \$5 million annually to the federal treasury.

PFAA seems to be reasonably easy and cheap to administer, but if the \$5 million were allocated to increase payments to PFAA this could well increase by 50 per cent, in most years, the payments under PFAA. I do not say that PFAA should replace crop insurance, and I do not think that PFAA should supplant or diminish the scope of crop insurance, nor would I wish to have a significant proportion of farmers opt out of crop insurance in favour of PFAA. I believe, however, that governments should involve themselves in preventing the worst results of a disaster, particularly a climatic disaster, to farmers.

Consideration should be given to upgrading the PFAA in a more modern setting and with a more realistic payment to farmers. Money spent here, in my opinion, is extremely valuable from a social point of view, if nothing else, and we should consider it in that light. It is perhaps difficult to reach a perfect balance between social spending and pure crop insurance, but I believe PFAA goes some distance in this regard. I believe that a study of this problem should be carried out, and I am sure that the PFAA should be retained with useful modifications which would not detract from the crop insurance principle.

I have one other grievance to raise which affects particularly my own constituency of Dauphin and that of my colleague the hon. member for Marquette (Mr. Stewart). This point concerns the damage done to crops of farmers all around the edges of Riding Mountain National Park. I believe other parks are in this category and that provincial parks also are involved. A great deal of attention has been given to conservation and preservation of wildlife. It is to our credit—and I am very happy about this—that we have been successful to a considerable degree, but the supply of game has increased at least in relation to the wildlife habitat that can support it. Increasingly there is damage to the crops of farmers who live in these areas. It does not matter that the number of farms involved is relatively small in number; it is a problem that the farmers are powerless to do anything about.

In Riding Mountain National Park there is a large herd of elk variously estimated at 7,000 to 11,000. Periodically, as happens in respect of all animal populations and even, unfortunately, in respect of humans, population explosion takes place. At the present time there seems to be a very excessive population of deer, mainly elk, in the Riding

[Mr. Ritchie.]

Mountain National Park. The term “game management” is increasingly being used to define the keeping of game within reasonable limits in a given area so that it may cause the least possible damage to other interests. Unfortunately, the people who administer our national parks never seem to have heard of this concept. I believe that in Riding Mountain National Park the game people will have to decide to manage deer population so that depredation of surrounding farmlands can be kept at a minimum.

The national parks administration has been singularly unresponsive to complaints and attempts to see that reason is exercised in respect of this problem. I think this is one more example of the national parks being administered as if they were a fiefdom, with complete disregard for the surrounding communities. It is very much like the days of the old feudal lords. No matter what game management is carried on, there will always be damage from wildlife. It seems very necessary that the federal government and provincial governments take a hand in compensating those who sustain severe losses which in a few cases are disastrous. Up until now, both levels of government have largely closed their eyes to this problem. With increasing hunting licences and higher fees, more money should now be available for this purpose. As more and more people move into the cities, there is a greater demand for hunting recreation and more money must be allocated for compensation for crop damage.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a word about the grain situation that crop insurance is designed to correct. There is no doubt that the next 12 months will be critical. We have completed the Lift program. So far as the western grain producers are concerned, this program has left them in despair. They know not where to go from here. There is an enormous summerfallow from last year, of 38 million acres—the largest in Canadian history. This could produce an enormous crop, but this land will have to be seeded because it cannot be re-summerfallowed.

The minister in charge of the Wheat Board has been credited with saying that exports of what could reach 550 million bushels in the crop year, but recent indications are that with Russia likely to refuse the 53 million bushels left over from the 1966 deal, there is no likelihood that Canadian export sales will reach this figure. A figure of 360 million bushels to 450 million bushels seems much more likely. It is estimated that there will be a carryover of at least 650 million bushels on hand at the end of July, 1971, although I think no one really knows what is on hand in the farmers' bins. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics method of estimating does not seem very accurate and many competent people doubt that there is as much grain on Canadian farms as indicated. Nevertheless, there still is a large amount of wheat in storage.

Although grain has been moving out of western Canada, so far as wheat is concerned, most of it has been coming from stocks that have been held in storage by the Wheat Board. The decision of the government to do away with the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act means that \$70 million allocated for this will be used, presumably, for