

Government Orders

the horse when the stable doors have already been thrown open.

The bill we are passing today is a good bill but it does not solve all the problems of agriculture in this country. It does not even begin to do that. We want to see it passed. However, we want to see the government show some responsibility with regard to the farm credit crisis which is facing this country. This bill certainly does not cover those crises and what will resolve those problems, many of which are devastating for thousands and thousands of producers in this country.

• (1545)

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle): Mr. Speaker, I wish to participate in the discussion of Bill C-95 considering the changes to the Farm Credit Corporation Act.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge that I do have a bit of a conflict of interest in this. The head office of the Farm Credit Corporation is located in my constituency and I am of course concerned with it. I would like to acknowledge the government's moving the head offices to Regina. It makes a lot of sense, especially considering that the largest land owner in the province of Saskatchewan is the Farm Credit Corporation. In September it held 1,943 leases totalling 877,000 acres of land. It is the largest land holder in my province of Saskatchewan.

There is much in Bill C-95 that we support. We are happy to see that the government dropped the one section, section 5, trying to establish in the bill that it is exempted from the provincial laws. Of course, the government did that in part because of the court decision.

We can pass laws but we should also surely deal with the intent. I still have some concern here. There are some very grave problems facing the farm community. We have heard this eloquently expressed by members from all sides of the House.

Farm families are losing their land. This land has often been in the family for many generations. There is a crisis, mainly due to the dramatic drop in what farmers get for what they produce. While the costs of production have gone up, their return has gone down.

Many farmers have been continuing to exist on the edge of bankruptcy. They are never certain whether it is

this year they go under or whether they will be able to survive for one more year in the hope that things will improve. It is no wonder that in Saskatchewan we call our province "next year country". If it is not drought or frost or grasshoppers that threaten farms, it is low commodity prices. But the sense of optimism and hope that exists in my province, particularly among the farming community, makes them keep going. It is in the hope that next year conditions will be better, prices will be better and again they will be able to make an honest return on all their effort and investment.

One of the problems, of course, has been the declining value in farm land. Billions of dollars have been lost in the province of Saskatchewan just on the decrease in the value of the land. Many farmers are staying on the land because they do not feel that the price for farm land is adequate right now. They are hoping that the price will go up, that the farm economy will turn around. Then they will be in a position to sell.

That means the average age on the farm continues to increase. By that I mean the average age of the farmer on the land is quite high. It is because young people are not able to get into farming. They are either being discouraged or they do not have the necessary capital to get in.

• (1550)

To begin to turn all this around requires a new mind-set, a new attitude, particularly on the part of federal and provincial governments. It is a crisis that can only be addressed by co-operation between federal and provincial governments.

The provincial government in Saskatchewan made some honest attempts to deal with the farm debt crisis and the numbers of farmers being forced into bankruptcy and having to give up their land. The province moved to develop a moratorium on farm foreclosure. Since the FCC was the largest land holder in Saskatchewan it was very important that it co-operate.

The federal government took the position that legally they did not have to co-operate and apparently one of the courts have found in their favour. As I mentioned before it is not just a legality. It is more than that. I implore the federal government and the Minister of Agriculture to de-politicize agriculture and to look at the attempts by the Government of Saskatchewan to