

Wheat Acreage Reduction

A survey of the competitive position of Canadian wheat in selected markets suggests that the principal causes of Canada's declining market share are: a lack of consistent quality as measured by uniformity of protein content—

The minister tells us we are now going to get a new grading system, starting next year. I am glad he has awakened, though it is five, ten or 20 years after the farm spokesmen have been saying this. Point No. 2 is:

● (12:40 a.m.)

—insufficient flexibility in pricing to meet market competition.

We must have flexibility in this country in this regard. Whenever this concept of flexibility was departed from, it was to our cost. Lower prices have always been an advantage to farmers of other countries, especially when they have been subsidized by their national treasuries. Point No. 3 relates to inadequate market development effort. If you do not give the Canadian Wheat Board the finances and staff it needs, how can it possibly enter the field of market development? It will not do that job very well if you handcuff it with inadequate national policies. Point No. 4 relates to increased self-sufficiency in importing countries. Point No. 5 is:

—unfair competition resulting from the use of export subsidies—

That relates to a concept we have; we still expect Canadian farmers to compete against the treasuries of other nations. Point No. 6 is:

—the manner in which the government-assisted export programs are carried out by competing exporters.

Again I say, when many of our industries are aided and subsidized, why should Canadian farmers be expected to sell wheat and take declining prices, while farmers of other nations who are subsidized could not care less how low wheat prices fall on the export market, because they still obtain their price?

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Benjamin: Unless the policies of the national government make sure that the Wheat Board has the backing of the entire nation, no one will be able to sell wheat, not even a fancy salesman like the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher). The Canadian Wheat Board must be authorized by the national government to extend credit terms with low interest rates to importing countries and make a host of other arrangements which will involve the backing of the national treasury.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

Mr. Lang: It does.

Mr. Benjamin: To expect farmers to operate under present conditions is absurd. It seems that the policies of this government and previous governments have been designed to eliminate farmers very quickly. The new policy is an extension of those policies. The government, its experts and those fancypants, ivory-tower editorial writers always talk about rationalization. That is double-talk. What they really mean is, "We need to take 100,000 farmers off the land." The government has consistently catered to corporate farms, to corporations that insert themselves into rural communities, and tried to eliminate efficient and independent family farms. That has been the government's policy and this program of acreage payments, despite claims Liberal spokesmen have made in the last few days and will continue making in the next couple of months, will not improve the cash position of farmers.

Anyone who suggests that the program will help the agricultural industry of western Canada is broadcasting a myth. I agree with the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Douglas), the \$6 and \$10 payment per acre is insufficient. I have talked to farmers from different parts of Saskatchewan; I was out there last Friday, Saturday and Sunday talking with them. Those who live in the wetter lands have to summer fallow several times. This \$6 will not cover the cost of summer fallowing. For those farmers who live in the wetter areas with a fair amount of rainfall, the \$6 will hardly cover their costs. After the \$6 per acre is exhausted, they will let weeds grow.

The minister's program will mean that a great many farmers will use herbicides on their land and pollution will result. We do not know what the effect will be on the soil, on water tables, and on food that is grown when that land is brought back into production. A number of farmers from the Melfort-Tisdale area have said that it costs about \$4 per acre to make land ready for grass seed. Clearly, therefore, the program does not go far enough. It is not an incentive.

A farmer who farms a few miles north of the United States border in the constituency of the hon. member for Assiniboia phoned me this afternoon saying that he has 600 acres in crop and 600 acres in summer fallow. He has consistently operated his farm that way. Considering the average rainfall and light land in that part of the country—the hon. member