

*Business of Supply*

agriculture had not been involved in any policy discussions. There is surely cause to ponder there.

Our expensive stabilization schemes just do not seem to be doing the job, Mr. Chairman. As I have said before, they have brought Canadian agriculture to the state that we now have only one commodity, grains, that can be merchandised internationally. Surely to bring us into a competitive situation the government should be looking more and more at income tax as a vehicle for helping agriculture in this country.

I should just like to quote what one farmer has said about the latest stabilization scheme that the minister is trying to sell western Canada. He writes:

I'll offer a deal to Mr. Lang. I won't put up that \$500 cash for the stabilization plan (I'll pay off my note at the Credit Union instead) and he won't have to squeeze the general Canadian taxpayer for the \$1,000 he has promised to put up on my behalf should I go belly up. That way we'll all save money.

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that we started down the slippery slope several years ago when the federal government task force on agriculture indicated that there was no real future for western agriculture in particular, and proposed restricted production for the prairies. This task force report was accepted by the government.

Since the railways have to plan years ahead, they looked to their operation and decided that, as a result of government policy, it would be necessary to reduce their services in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. This led to their filing for abandonment of most of their branch lines in western Canada.

It was a technical requirement of the act that the railways had to file an application for abandonment with the Canadian Transport Commission to be eligible for a subsidy, and of course they did so in regard to almost every branch line that we have. However, the uproar as a result of this transportation policy and the LIFT program forced the government in Ottawa to act. It declared a five-year freeze on rail abandonment, which expired January 1, 1975, but has since been renewed. But the grain companies still do not know where the lines are going to be or where they can build because the railways do not know which lines are going to be retained. In addition, we have discontent over federal feed grain policy. Western producers generally feel that it costs too little to move western feed grain east.

However, the real threat facing the prairie livestock industry is perhaps not a grain freight rate inequity; it is the possibility that national market sharing agreements will hamstring prairie hog and cattle feeders next time grain is cheap and they want to expand production.

A national marketing plan would allow them only limited access to eastern markets in this country. It could also require import restrictions, which in turn would be sure to bring retaliatory action from the United States. The U.S. market is the closest and potentially the largest outlet for prairie livestock and meat. This market is desperately needed. However, it seems some policy makers in Ottawa would like to do away with this. This seems to be the biggest threat to prairie livestock producers and grain growers at the present time, and it is a threat that they must guard against.

There are some basic questions that have to be answered and, I suggest the first is this: are farmers in a business

[Mr. Hamilton (Swift Current-Maple Creek).]

like any other? In short, we want to know where we are going in Canadian agriculture and what the targets are. Full, efficient agricultural production in Canada is a necessary fact of life.

**Mr. O'Connell:** Mr. Chairman, I intend to enter only briefly into this debate on the estimates of the Department of Agriculture and I wish to raise three or four of what appear to me to be concerns, as a parliamentarian from an urban constituency. The first is the problem of insuring that young people will find farming an attractive occupation and will make every effort to go into agriculture at a time when other opportunities may appear to be more attractive to them.

I also find that many constituents are concerned about the alleged disappearance of our prime farm land, land that would produce food. I want to know from the minister, if he has an opportunity to tell us, what he has been able to do about this matter. I want to raise the matter of purchase of farm land increasingly by foreigners, and I will raise the matter in terms of the Foreign Investment Review Agency and whether or not there is a role there for it to play in deciding whether such purchases are in Canada's interests.

Then finally, I will raise a matter that the minister may find somewhat vexing but which I think is in its right perspective as a supportive suggestion, namely, that consumers be found recognized places on marketing boards.

If I may begin with the question of young people being attracted to farming, I know this is more than a question of credit. But what I would appreciate knowing is how successful are the efforts made by farm credit institutions to put funds in the hands of young people in order to encourage them to become another generation that will own farm land and enter agriculture. What proportion of farm credit loans are going to people who are, say, younger than 40, or in the middle or younger age groups? If the efforts have been unsuccessful then we should look at further ways to encourage the younger generation. In city constituencies we are told that the farm population at the moment is aging. I am not sure what the average age is, but I believe it is in the middle fifties. Farming is a strenuous occupation and we must have a group coming up behind.

In addition to the question of credit there is the preservation of our prime farm land. As I understand it, technically speaking "prime farm land" means land that is classified in the Canada lands inventory as Nos. 1, 2 and 3. We have a very limited amount of prime farm land. I believe it is correct to say that almost one half of our No. 1 farm land in Canada is in southern Ontario.

Southern Ontario is going through a very rapid urbanizing and industrializing process, but surely preserving our No. 1 farm land is in the national interest. I suggest the question is larger than the province of Ontario which has jurisdiction over land use planning. I would therefore ask the Minister of Agriculture just what perspective his department has in this regard.

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We hear these frightening stories about how much No. 1 farm land goes out of production almost every hour. We hear the counter argument that a certain amount come back in. No. 1 farm land is land that will grow almost