

guilty indeed if he had been carried away in the paroxysm of interest that he displayed in connection with this matter.

**Senator Argue:** Don't get too personal.

## AGRICULTURE

### EXCESS SUMMER FALLOW—EFFECT ON SOIL FERTILITY

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** I should like to ask the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board another question arising out of the television broadcast I have already referred to, which I think is of considerable importance.

We have heard testimony—and the minister will probably recall this—about the effect of summer fallow on the fertility of the soil in the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, if I am not mistaken, in which we were given certain warnings about that policy. In this broadcast last night—this is a very serious point, and I know the minister appreciates it—the allegation was made that the quota system, which, in effect, bonuses, or is alleged to bonus, farmers who have summer fallow, is part of the problem in the sense that some farmers are continuing to follow the practice of summer fallowing in spite of the fact that it might be dangerous. What I want to know from the minister—and he may not be able to answer me now—is what the official position of the scientists of the government is with respect to the effect of excess summer fallow on the fertility of the soil?

**Hon. Hazen Argue (Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board):** I think I should endeavour to answer the honourable senator's question by saying that the whole matter of quotas, and how they are applied in this system, has been under review for some time, and the Canadian Wheat Board has sought advice from many areas. One of the very important organizations or bodies to whom they have looked for advice is their own advisory committee, which is composed of farmers themselves. I have been part of this discussion. There are arguments which say that the quota system should have some relation to productivity itself, while there are others who feel that the quota system as presently established is generally rather good, and improvements, or changes, should be carried out with great care and caution.

The question of summer fallow is an important one for every producer, and it is fair to say, and correct to say, that over the years in western Canada, especially in recent years, there has been a general reduction in summer fallow acreage. This has taken place, in general, in those areas of the prairies where moisture conditions are not usually a particularly difficult factor. In other words, there is less summer fallow in the areas where there is greater moisture and in the areas where there is a lower temperature—the north and northeast—and perhaps even a lower rate of wind, or lower drying factor.

If you farmed in southern Saskatchewan, southwestern Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta, and were to follow the learned advice of Professor Rennie to remove your summer fallow and engage in continuous cropping, or close to it, you would soon be bankrupt. I am certain, as a farmer, that those

[Senator Roblin.]

people who undertook to follow his advice would go broke very quickly, because the people in those areas, who have as much as half a million dollars or more invested in their farms, many of whom have had a university education themselves and are probably as well trained as Dr. Rennie, believe that Dr. Rennie's advice does not fit their area.

The research station at Swift Current, which is in the middle of this area, where there is almost 50 per cent summer fallow, say—and they have made this very, very clear—that they think Dr. Rennie is very much mistaken as far as that area is concerned. I suppose, therefore, with respect to this advice—as is often the case with advice—that there are places where it fits and others where it does not fit.

Dr. Rennie, however, has done very commendable work in pointing out—and he makes this qualification, with which I certainly agree—that in areas where there is usually ample moisture the amount of summer fallow can be very materially reduced. As a practising farmer in that area, I know that the farmers there, and those to the south and west, who have done well over the years have consistently followed the practice of almost 50 per cent summer fallow.

● (1450)

**Senator Roblin:** I believe the minister is aware of the Dobson-Lee report of the early 1970's on this subject.

**Senator Argue:** On quota?

**Senator Roblin:** Yes, on quotas and on the summer fallow problem involved in the way that quotas are defined these days.

The minister is right with respect to the difficulties he has mentioned, but the problem is, if some scientists are correct, that the fertility of the soil is being damaged in a way that is almost irreparable. It may take decades to bring it back into full production again.

If there is a question in dispute among the scientists, will the minister undertake to have this matter investigated in an authoritative way so that we can be sure of the facts.

**Senator Argue:** I am not sure that I am going to have anything more done on this matter than is now being done.

**Senator Roblin:** What is that?

**Senator Argue:** The Swift Current experimental station is dealing with the question of summer fallow all the time, and Dr. Rennie is dealing with the question of summer fallow all the time. There may be a need for the two to get together, but that is all.

I have practised farming in that area, and although I have not had as much experience as some others my impression is that if the soil is handled with modern methods of tillage—surface tillage rather than deep tillage—and if there is maintenance of trash cover, and the use of fertilizer in years when there is moisture, then that area will be much more productive than it was 20, 30 or 40 years ago. With nitrogen-fixing properties within summer fallow, I feel that—and I give you my own personal judgment because I am not a professional—the practices in that area have not led to a substantial deterior-