

*Supply*

to farm to raise the grain, not to speculate in its sale. This leads them to prefer the board marketing system.

Other producers, of course, have taken the view that the rapeseed market has been doing very well, that the price has been high and that the product has been moving. This is the aspect they are apt to stress in their arguments with other producers on this question. Let hon. members have no doubt about this, however: we propose to proceed by holding consultations on this question with producers in the very near future as to the kind of marketing system they prefer and then to move in accordance with their wishes, given the support of the House of Commons for the principle—a sensible one in my view—that machinery should be available to enable producers to handle their products in the way that producers desire.

The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar—I am glad to see him back in his place—also dealt with the need to provide relief for farmers whose crops suffer from particularly adverse weather conditions. He said there was a need for the Minister of Agriculture to view the scene in person. The Minister of Agriculture is an extremely energetic and sympathetic man who is going about his duties with tremendous enthusiasm and with the interest of the farmers very much at heart. He is away, necessarily, for several hours this afternoon on official business. On his behalf as well as on my own I should like to say a few words on this subject.

Hon. members are apt to ignore the fact that the provinces have some very important responsibilities in the field of agriculture. The hon. member says the Minister of Agriculture should personally visit the scene of these crop failures. Mr. Speaker, when localized problems occur it is particular fitting that provincial ministers of agriculture should take a lead and deal with them. This has been the position of the federal government for some time with respect to problems which can arise in localized areas, whether they involve fire or flood or unusual weather conditions.

Essentially, responsibility lies within the area in which the setback occurs. The federal government is ready to assist when the magnitude of the problem is so great that the burden would be too much for the provincial government concerned to bear. Notwithstanding this general rule, we have involved ourselves to the extent of strengthening the hand of the provincial ministers of agriculture both in eastern and in western Canada by offering certain forms of assistance in situations of this kind.

There are certain difficulties attached to rushing in with assistance when particular problems involving crop damage occur. Crop insurance programs across this country have been developed as a result of initiatives taken by this government and its predecessor. The usefulness of the program is gradually improving, and consequent upon the step now proposed, in accordance with which the federal government would bear an even greater share of the cost of the premiums across the country, it may improve even further. It is, of course, important that the crop insurance plans should be good plans and that farmers take advantage of what is, after all, the main measure of insurance against the occasional disaster which might occur. To some extent the provision of special assistance

[Mr. Lang.]

militates against the development of good crop insurance plans.

I should also like to draw attention two ways in which other governments have acted to assist areas in which weather conditions, particularly in early winter, give rise to chronic problems. There is the forage incentive program, now going into its third year of operation, under which some 3.7 million acres have already been taken from grain production and put to grass and forage as a base for livestock industries and to enable farmers to raise produce which is free from certain hazards such as early snow which can afflict wheat, barley and other grain crops.

I am happy to note that applications for payment under the forage incentive program came largely from areas in which the cattle industry should develop, areas in which grain production may be hazardous because of the recurrence of unfavourable weather conditions year after year. It is also the case that over the past three years we have offset some of the problems which arose in connection with the production of barley in those areas, thus making it easier for farmers to switch some of the risk away from themselves by planting barley instead of wheat. We achieved this result by revising the quota system in a way which brought about equality of treatment for barley growers as compared with wheat growers. We did it by carefully watching the initial prices for barley to ensure that they were attractive. In doing this we benefited the whole country by assuring new feed grain markets, markets which had for so long been neglected in this country. We have now gone into them in a big way. Barley is being grown in those areas where the climate is conducive to the shorter maturing period required by that crop, to the benefit of the farmers directly concerned and also to the national good.

This year we have also taken advantage of legislation passed by parliament at the initiative of the Liberal government two and a half years ago. I refer to the ability to extend by order in council cash advances in relation to grain which is still unharvested. This is a modest form of assistance but a useful one, so useful that in two previous periods it received special attention in the House in the form of legislation to enable the government to extend those provisions to the farmers affected. We have been able to do this by order in council as a result of the foresight shown on the last occasion when this question was discussed. On that occasion the provision to which I have referred was specifically embodied in the law.

The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar inquired about present Wheat Board cash advances. I have already discussed this subject with officials of the Wheat Board as a result of my own concern about the position of farmers who find themselves in a difficult financial situation as a result of adverse weather conditions—farmers who are in arrears in their repayments and in whose case the Wheat Board feels it is necessary to take some action to protect its own position. I am afraid that the position in which the Wheat Board finds itself is such as to require some steps to be taken in connection with these arrears. The farmers in question had undertaken to be in possession of adequate grain to repay the advances at the time they took out the initial advance. This has created some difficulties.