

Oral Questions

Mr. Wise: Madam Speaker, I suggest to the minister that about 10 per cent, or 25,000, farmers are in very serious difficulty. I think it is a foregone conclusion that there will be some help for the home owners of this country, and I certainly support that. I think it is a foregone conclusion that the minister's position is in support of aid for Chrysler.

When can we expect the Minister of Agriculture to show some tangible evidence of his concern for a sector of the population for whom he, as Minister of Agriculture, has direct responsibility?

Mr. Whelan: Madam Speaker, perhaps the former minister in his short term of office did not have the opportunity to do the great things he is suggesting that I do at the present time. We did some of those things with Chrysler, and some small business people and others would like to have them. We are working on this because we represent all people. We know that if Chrysler's workers do not have money, they cannot buy food, and so on. So we work very closely together.

But I can say that farm credit, at 13 per cent interest today, is a very envied interest rate. That is being subsidized by the government at the present time because that rate is less than the government is paying.

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL AID FOR HOG PRODUCERS

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): I should like to put a supplementary, Madam Speaker. I have listened carefully to the answer given by the Minister of Agriculture. According to him the financial condition of farmers would seem to be fine. Now, could the minister tell us about the condition of a very special group, the hog producers? According to our information, during the past four months they have been incurring a deficit of millions of dollars per week. Is the minister aware of the situation? If so, does he intend to announce a special program to help hog producers?

[English]

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I am sure the hon. member also knows that hogs are a named commodity under the Agricultural Stabilization Act. That fiscal year just finished, at the end of March, and we will be announcing, I hope in the very near future, a stabilization program for hog producers. But to be fair, they geared their production to an unlimited market, and overproduced. They are suffering the consequences of not managing the supply of pork needed for the market; that is why they are now in dire need of assistance. They have said in the past, "Mr. Minister, keep your cotton pickin' fingers off our industry." Now they are saying, "Mr. Minister, please save our industry." If they had managed things a little better, they would not be in the economic position they are right now.

Mr. Nielsen: This sounds like hogwash.

[Translation]

Mr. La Salle: Madam Speaker. I accept the comments which the minister has just made on production control. In that context, is the minister trying to convince producers to join a national board? In any event, considering the present situation of hog producers, and I think he finds the situation dramatic, before the creation of a national board could the minister try to devise a formula for financial assistance now essential for the survival of hog producers?

● (1425)

[English]

Mr. Whelan: Madam Speaker, we know that hundreds of hog producers, especially young people, who entered the production field in the last year or two are now in the greatest financial difficulty. Regarding having a better kind of marketing system, there seems to be that kind of desire by many of them. The same is true of the potato industry, which the former questioner mentioned. It is in a state of chaos. However, the four provinces have agreed to go ahead with it—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Ontario. I firmly believe that the Quebec producers want to go ahead with it, but I believe Mr. Garon does not want to because it would appear he was favouring the federal system so that they could market together; therefore, he does not want to go ahead with that kind of program at this time.

I think the same thing applies to a hog marketing board, because we know Mr. Garon wants that kind of thing for his provincial producers, but at the same time he is saying the hog industry is in fairly healthy condition. That is not what the producers are telling me. In meetings I held with Quebec producers last week—two different groups—they both pointed out the dire need of assistance that they have mainly because of overproduction and a very poor market for their product.

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ENERGY

GASOLINE—PROPOSED PRICE INCREASE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister on the important subject of gasoline prices. In a speech in Toronto on February 12, the Prime Minister said, and I quote from his text:

The Liberal price hike will be less than half what the Tories plan to inflict on you.

In the same text he said:

For the consumer that means a gasoline price increase which will not rise by 32 cents a gallon this year as it would with a Clark government.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, does his government today stand by that commitment which he made less than a week before the election?

Right Hon P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I would want to re-do the mathematics of it, but in my memory—