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Increasing need for substantial growth in food production

The Minister of Agriculture, Eugene F. Whelan, addressed the eighteenth session of the Food and Agriculture Conference in Rome on November 11. He spoke of the priorities and incentives needed if progress is to be made in expanding world agricultural production. Passages from Mr. Whelan's address follow:

...The current food situation is somewhat better than it was a year ago, but far from satisfactory. Much of this short-run gain is due to improved weather conditions in North America and in some of the developing countries. It is offset to some degree by very low grain production in other areas. But we have no reason to be overly optimistic.

Over the next five years, the need for substantive increased food production in the developed countries will be of much greater importance for world food supplies than was thought at the beginning of the 1970s. To solve the food problem, developing countries and the FAO must give high priority to agricultural and fisheries development and adopt policies which give adequate incentive to agricultural producers if real progress is to be made.

How do we cope with problems of expanding agricultural production? It is very disturbing to find that 30 years after the Second World War we are still faced with a major food problem. Despite the gains in technology, despite the technical efforts of the United Nations specialized agencies, we have more instead of fewer hungry people.

A top priority in the interests of all countries is to ensure the vigour of the world economy. This requires, from our standpoint, an efficient agriculture producing enough food for all, which can't be done without providing a reasonable livelihood to the farmers of the world. We know that without farmers, without the tools of production, and without necessary incentives, food production will fall short of our growing needs.

Let me turn to the realities of the current situation. Since the last FAO conference, there has been a flurry of activity. I must say, however, that in the Canadian point of view we have been more successful organizing new and reorganizing old committees than in increasing food production. Have we

really reached the producers and governments of all countries with the message of the need to increase food production and efficiency? I am not so sure. We are still suffering from shortages. What have we done?

We have before us the FAO Program of Work for 1976-77. It is in line with the World Food Conference resolutions. However, I feel we have spread ourselves too thinly. We are trying to do everything. I am looking for a point of focus.

Perhaps we the Ministers of Agriculture can, during the next few weeks, highlight the key issues. Trade is important but for countries with food shortages, increased food production is equally as important. Mechanization of agriculture is important but in many countries we must give priority to finding jobs for the unemployed in the rural areas. Agrarian reform is essential for many countries but the motivation must come from within a country. It cannot come from outside.

In principle, therefore, we favour the positive over-all response to the new international economic order proposals with details of implementation being left to the appropriate technical bodies for further consideration and examination. We are in favour of using appropriate mechanisms for transferring a greater share of the world's resources to developing countries. This is especially important in the food area.

What Canada has done

Canada has responded to the interests of developing countries in several areas, including commodity stabilization, trade liberalization, investment and natural resources, technology for development, and agriculture and rural development. In fact, not only have we expanded our total aid program, we have restructured it towards agricultural and rural development.

As an exporter and importer of agri-

Mail moves at last

The longest postal strike in Canadian history - 43 days - ended when employees returned to work on December 2 after 51.8 per cent voted in favour of accepting the agreement offered by the Government. Results of the ballot showed that of 14,541 votes cast, 7,531 were in favour of acceptance and 6,859, or 47.5 per cent, were against. There were 141 spoiled ballots. Some 10 per cent of the 22,000 union members who had returned to work during the strike, it was reported, were barred from voting by the union.