

future, if anything, is perhaps even worse than what they face right now.

I go back to what I said earlier, that is, farmers deserve something better. Haggling, bargaining and confrontation has been going on between the federal government and the provinces. The farmers deserve better than that.

I do not think there is any doubt about it, but that the federal government has to take almost all the blame. As far as we know it has the money. It says that it is prepared to give it. It says it is on the table, but it will not release it despite the need of the farmers. It will not release it unless the provinces meet certain conditions. That is unfair.

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege for me to join the debate today and to have this opportunity to express to the House the plight of many of my constituents in my constituency of Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Over 50 per cent of the voters in my riding live outside the urban area of Regina. Many of them are farmers or living in smaller communities that are very dependant upon the farm economy. Most of them are dry-land farmers. There is some mixed farming and some cattle operation in my district, but most are grain farmers.

As I have travelled around my riding and gone through the coffee shops and talked to farm people in the garages, the town halls and up and down Main Street in the many small communities that make up part of Regina—Qu'Appelle, I have never seen such a depressed mood as I have found this year. There is a sense of hopelessness and of helplessness. There is a sense that nobody is listening to them. They see the value of their lands decreasing year after year. They see the value of what they are so proud to produce, some of the best grain in the world, decreasing. They are some of the most efficient producers in the world. Yet when they sit back and add up the costs of production and what they will get for the produce, it just does not make sense.

When you look at the statistics, Mr. Speaker, particularly for the farm economy in Saskatchewan, you begin to see the dimension of the problem. Saskatchewan has the fastest growing rate of poverty in the country, second only to Newfoundland.

Supply

A total of 303 communities in the province have lost population since 1986. A thousand farm families leave the land every year in Saskatchewan and are not replaced.

In 1989, Saskatchewan recorded the highest level of bankruptcies in the history of the province.

Since 1984, more than 60,000 people have left Saskatchewan.

Between September, 1988, and September, 1989, Farm Credit Corporation foreclosures in Saskatchewan on farm families increased by 60 per cent.

Over 10,000 notices of intent to foreclose on land or seize machinery, crops or livestock have been served on Saskatchewan farmers by lending institutions.

Today, agricultural lenders hold over 850,000 acres of Saskatchewan farm land, compared to 121,000 acres in 1987.

Realized net farm income in Saskatchewan is expected to be down some 87 per cent from last year, down \$109 million from \$910 million in 1989.

The value of farm land in Saskatchewan has fallen dramatically—30 per cent in the last five years.

The depressing statistics go on. People have seen their life savings diminish. The value of the land which was their pension and security in old age has totally dropped. Now, many of these older farmers who want to retire, cannot. Many of their sons, and in an increasing number of cases, daughters, who want to take over the farm operation, cannot, because of high interest rates, the low prices they will get for their commodities and the general insecurity that exists.

The farmers in my district do not want government hand-outs. They want an opportunity to fairly compete with the producers in Argentina, Europe and the United States. The farmers in my district figure they can compete with these countries, that they can produce some of the best wheat in the world. But they cannot compete against the treasuries of the United States and Europe. That is like banging your head against the wall. They cannot win that fight.

They need help. They need a commitment from the Canadian government that it will stand behind them so that Canadian agriculture, particularly agriculture in our