

We are hoping the talks at GATT will be successful this fall. I understand they are going into the final round in the next two or three months. The success there is absolutely essential because the United States, through its export enhancement program, is going to up the ante. It has moved from \$600 million to some \$900 million this summer and this fall for driving down the price of grain, oilseeds and other farm commodities.

Next March that goes up to \$1.2 billion. Clearly it is going to escalate. As far as we know right now, the need for GRIP payments in the 1992 calendar year will be essential. If they are used through interim payments of the Gross Revenue Insurance Program to solve the shortfall and farm income, the cutbacks that the government implemented last year, clearly farmers are going to be in the worst possible situation next year, because of the funding that should be provided under that program is not going to be adequate.

It seems to me that the question here today is most of all: is the Government of Canada going to take its responsibility? How will it respond? Will it respond now in a fair and just way for the cutbacks it made in 1990-91 crop year? Will it be dragged, kicking and screaming, after thousands of farmers have rallied all fall in communities like Lucknow, Miami and Battleford, Russell, Brandon, and Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Lord only knows how many other places in Ontario? Will it respond now in a timely manner for the shortfall that they suffered?

After all, the government has brought in a program where it is going to be putting up something like only 42 per cent of the premium under GRIP. It has offloaded drastically its support. It is 35 per cent to farmers, 25 per cent to provincial governments. The need is for transitional funding for the 1990-91 crop year.

When the minister for grains and oilseeds responds today to the unanimous resolution of the House of Commons, I hope he will respond in a full and forthright way. Otherwise, there is going to be chaos, disaster and personal hardship for hundreds of thousands of farmers across this country.

• (1110)

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg—St. James): Madam Speaker, I would like the hon. member for Algoma to comment on one dimension of the farm crisis. The agricultural community is now facing the loss of its best farmers.

Supply

The hon. member for Mackenzie mentioned in his speech a few minutes ago that this pernicious trade war has been going on for a number of years. It is not new. It has been going on now for about six or seven years. In that time it has had devastating effects on the agricultural community.

I understand that in the province of Saskatchewan alone two families a day are leaving farms. According to my calculation, over 3,000 families have left Saskatchewan farms in the last five years. Perhaps some of those were marginal operations. Perhaps a few of those were not the best farmers in the world. My understanding is that the situation is now so serious that some of our best farmers are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. If something is not done very soon we will lose our very best farmers.

I would like the hon. member for Algoma to comment on that if he could.

Mr. Foster: Madam Speaker, I think the question the hon. member for Winnipeg—St. James has posed is a very serious one. In fact, a great many of our farmers are part-time farmers. They not only have their farm income but their spouse works off the farm, and often they too work off the farm.

I was at a meeting just last Friday with a group of farmers. The argument that one put to me was: "I have a very good operation. I run a very efficient operation. My wife works off the farm. She brings in a pretty good income. I have been working off the farm because I have been having trouble making a go of it. We are still going backwards with two of us working off the farm and doing the cropping and seeding in the time that we are not working. We are still going backwards".

I think that is the argument. That is what those farmers were saying. Just three weeks ago the hon. member and I met with a group of farmers in Portage in Manitoba. The same argument was made. A woman there spoke for herself and her husband: "We are very good farmers. We are very efficient. We have not bought any significant new machinery in eight years. Yet we are going backwards. We are just grinding away at our equity".

That is the key point. People want a signal. There should have been a hiatus last spring when we were moving away from an old system of safety nets to a new system that required farmers to make a larger contribution, that required provinces to make a larger contribution. By its very nature the federal government was reducing its requirement. Yet we did not get a clean launch on the system because the federal government