

*Oral Questions***AGRICULTURE**

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture.

British Columbia orchardists are facing serious financial difficulties as they prepare for their 1990 crop season. As the minister knows, they have not received the cost of production for over a decade now and bankers are becoming quite twitchy because of the growers' financial uncertainty.

B.C. fruit growers have pleaded for financial help, but the Minister of Agriculture has not yet made any firm commitments.

Can the minister assure British Columbia fruit growers that financial help is forthcoming so that they can obtain operating credit? Can he also advise as to the specific dollar value of that financial aid? Last, can he confirm as to precisely when that aid package will become available?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member knows, this industry is the subject of a provincial commission of inquiry. In our discussions with the provincial government it was felt that it would be appropriate to await the recommendations which will be brought down by that very intensive inquiry.

We have indicated to the provincial government that we would be prepared to work with it in providing the kind of support programs—

Some hon. members: Time.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member's colleagues do not want to listen to the answer—

Mr. MacWilliam: I am listening.

• (1500)

Mr. Mazankowski: I appreciate that the hon. member is listening. Perhaps he can control his neighbours.

I can assure the hon. member that in our discussions with my provincial counterpart we indicated when the report comes down we will be prepared to sit down with him and look at an appropriate program of support,

adjustment and restructuring as may be deemed necessary. I think it is important to await these findings.

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the minister is aware that because the growers are right in the middle of thinning and preparing for the 1990 season now, financial assistance is required at this point. A bank draft cannot simply be signed on a lick and a promise.

I would like to ask the minister whether he would assure B.C. growers that if the special assistance is provided, it would at least cover the cost of production for the 1990 season so that the creditors can be assured that they will have some financial security to proceed with their operations.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows, I am sure, that the federal government has provided a great amount of support and assistance to the industry over the years.

We are prepared to continue this, but it is important to do it in an effective and balanced way so that it does provide stability for the industry in the future.

The hon. member is aware that a portion of the \$500 million set aside for assisting the bottom line of the agriculture industry is available. We are engaged in bilateral discussions with the provincial government. We believe that the recommendation of the report of the commission of inquiry is imminent. We hoped that we can use that as a guide in terms of how we might design a program and for what period of time.

We do have some funding available for that purpose. As soon as we can arrive at an arrangement with the provincial government, hopefully it will provide a basis through which that industry can be supported.

Mr. Speaker: I want to advise the House that I must hear a question of personal privilege from the hon. Minister of National Revenue. I do not anticipate it will be long. We will then move to the vote according to the order.