

Adjournment Debate

confront farmers all too often. If we had in place a regularized, structured disaster relief program, the farmers would not have to worry about whether or not relief would be forthcoming when they face a disaster.

● (1805)

I urge the Government to act without delay and put in place a contingency plan to deal with farm crises, such as the one we faced this year. I asked for a commitment because during the summer when the Hon. Member for Assiniboia the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, was asked he refused to give that commitment to the farmers of his area.

As I pointed out yesterday, the immediate concern is for Government assistance to Prairie farmers now. This is the time of year when farmers traditionally have large bills and need help. This fall the farmers have the added burden of costs incurred to poison grasshoppers during the summer. Many farmers face certain bankruptcy, bankruptcy which the Government could help them avoid if the aid were forthcoming.

I urge the Government to accept its responsibility and provide Canadian farmers with desperately needed economic assistance now.

Mr. Pierre Blais (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): First, let me say to the Hon. Member that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) said yesterday that maybe within the next week or 10 days we will be in a position to come forward with phase 2 of the program. I understand the Hon. Member is in a hurry, but the Minister does what he can.

I am pleased to elaborate on the answer provided by the Minister of Agriculture yesterday, in response to the question posed by the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) on financial assistance to farmers to the drought affected areas of the Prairie provinces.

As the Minister told the House, the federal Government has already made an announcement with respect to a \$48 million program of assistance to prairie livestock producers. That is a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. In making that announcement on August 14, the Minister of Agriculture said federal assistance would be integrated with suitable provincial aid programs pending consultation with the four western provinces.

I am pleased to report that through the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration we have nearly completed our negotiations with the four western provinces. We should be in a position to sign agreements with them soon. The mechanisms for making payments to producers are being prepared. In Saskatchewan, payments to producers are already being made through the program announced by the Premier of that province in mid-July. In total, federal payments could amount to \$48 million.

The Minister also said in his August announcement that the Government would continue to monitor the situation in the Prairies and further action would be taken as needed. A task group, chaired by the Member for Assiniboia and including provincial Government representatives was to advise the Minister in this regard. I am sure that my honourable friends will

admit that the Member for Assiniboia did a very good job during the summer.

The task group, assisted by a technical committee of federal and provincial officials, has been engaged in this pursuit and will be meeting again during the first week of October. We expect further recommendations to be made as a result of that meeting. Without prejudicing those recommendations, I should mention that the rain that has fallen in the southern prairies in recent weeks has certainly had an impact on the situation. I am sure my hon. friend will not think that we are responsible for rain and snow.

In part, because of the downgrading of many grain crops due to moisture damage, there is no shortage of feed grain in the southern prairies at this time and prices are extremely reasonable, at least from the livestock producers point of view.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT—DESIGNATION OF AREAS IN ALBERTA UNDER FEDERAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put on the record a comment with regard to a question I asked of the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens) last Thursday. I asked the Minister whether he had taken action to designate areas of Alberta to tier 2 so that areas within Alberta that are presently experiencing high unemployment would then be able to take advantage of the Industrial and Regional Development Program offered by the federal Government. IRDP is the principal program of the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion or DRIE for providing direct financial assistance to industries in Canada. It has been in operation since July, 1983, and is administered primarily through DRIE's 12 regional and 25 local offices.

● (1810)

The objective of the program is to promote regional industrial expansion and development through the support of private sector initiatives with particular emphasis upon projects, industries and technologies with the greatest potential for economic return, sustained growth and international competitiveness. In other words, it is a massive program offered by the federal Government to encourage private enterprise to invest. It will assist private enterprise with grants and low-interest loans to create employment in areas where unemployment is very high.

When the former Government introduced its National Energy Program, it literally wiped out the employment and economic development which was taking place in Alberta. I draw the attention of the House to the tier system. If a district is classed as tier 1, it is eligible for very little in the way of incentive grants or assistance from the federal Government. In tier 2, there is automatic assistance to various companies which wish to invest and create employment. In tier 3, the Government hands out a lot more in the way of incentives. In tier 4, the Government just about hands out blank cheques to companies so that they will come into areas and develop new industries.