

Adjournment Debate

students out of a total of about 190 full-time and 76 part-time students in Canada in 1982. The average cost per student is therefore substantially reduced. Eventually, more inmates may be taking part in programs, and participating universities will be asked to offer such programs in the various regions. Depending on their experience and the variety of programs available, universities will be able to offer certain services including conventional courses, televised courses and correspondence courses.

[English]

AGRICULTURE—BEEF STABILIZATION PLAN—MEETING OF PROVINCIAL MINISTERS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, on February 28, I raised a question with the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) concerning the Government's plan to provide stabilization of the red meat industry, especially the beef industry. At that time the provincial ministers of agriculture were meeting. I asked the Minister if he was prepared to co-operate on a national tripartite stabilization program for the red meat industry. I asked a similar question on September 15. I would be interested to know from the Parliamentary Secretary if the Government is prepared to move ahead with this matter at this time.

I understand that the Ministers and the deputy ministers of agriculture across the country have met several times throughout the summer, in July and I believe again later in August. In fact, of the ten provincial Ministers I understand that four of them representing the four largest beef-producing Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario have made some agreement to proceed with a tripartite method of agricultural stabilization for the beef industry. I understand that this also applies to the pork industry.

● (1820)

I ask these questions of the Minister because I believe the situation in the red meat industry is really critical at this time. Prices for red meat are approximately 20 per cent to 25 per cent less than they were four years ago. During that four-year period we have seen interest rates climb to as high as 20 per cent and 24 per cent. There have been farm bankruptcies and foreclosures on a scale we have not witnessed since the 1930s. An Hon. Member of this House introduced Bill C-653, a measure that is similar to the farm bankruptcy legislation which was used in the 1930s. There has been a lot of support from both sides of the House toward the implementation of that legislation.

While I understand that negotiations are proceeding to do something in this regard, this would be treating the symptom rather than the problem. The real problem is that the producers of red meat in this country are not receiving an adequate return for their commodity from the marketplace. Obviously that is the best place to obtain an adequate return, because the consumer would then know what the commodity costs what it is worth. The producer should get an adequate return for his investment and work. This does not happen often

enough in the red meat industry for these producers to survive. It seems to me that the best interim solution is a tripartite stabilization program.

If we look at the estimates from the Department of Agriculture we see that some \$309 million is spent annually for the dairy producers; that the federal Government put up \$145 million for crop insurance; that the Western Grain Stabilization contributions of the federal Government are \$140 million; and that other stabilization programs for other commodities are only some \$88 million a year, with a total of \$682 million for stabilization.

Considering the impact the beef industry across the country has on the economy, it is important to the vitality and long term well being of rural Canada that this industry receive stabilization similar to what is provided other commodities produced in our country. I hope the Minister will work with the provincial Ministers in arriving at an agreement in the next few weeks which will result in stabilization assistance for this hard pressed industry, and industries that occasionally has a good year but too often and for too long has suffered from inadequate returns on its investment while its input costs have continued to rise. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will be able to indicate in his response that the Government is planning to move ahead during the next few weeks to establish a viable and equitable stabilization support system for the red meat industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Dionne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the task force which had been appointed by the provincial Ministers of Agriculture to develop a tripartite stabilization program for the red meat industry tabled its report at the annual meeting of Ministers of Agriculture at Brudenell, Prince Edward Island, last July. It was unable to come up with a program acceptable to the ten provinces.

The Ministers of Agriculture of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta made a suggestion to the federal Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), asking for the establishment of a tripartite program. The latter told them that he was prepared to consider their suggestion, but he requested additional information on the subject. He invited the Deputy Ministers of those four provinces to meet with the Deputy Minister of Agriculture Canada to prepare a detailed program at their earliest convenience.

The Deputy Ministers met three times, most recently here in Ottawa on October 6. They agreed on a feasible program and decided to submit the details to their respective ministers. Each participant is now reviewing the transcript of their proceedings and as soon as the Deputy Ministers confirm that the transcript faithfully reflects their agreement and consult their Ministers, the federal Minister of Agriculture will convene a federal-provincial meeting with his provincial counterparts so as to finalize the agreement.