

Supply

for its inadequate response to the problems of Canadian farmers, including a severe cost-price squeeze and debt burden, fierce predatory international competition and natural disasters, which have combined to place Canada's agricultural community in jeopardy.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we are bringing this motion to the attention of the House and the people of Canada because we are concerned with the crisis affecting Canadian agriculture and the family farm. This crisis has been rendered even more serious over the past few months because of natural disasters, particularly in western Canada. We want to draw this to the attention of the Government and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise), as well as the Canadian people, in order to heighten the consciousness of the average Canadian concerning the precariousness of the position of the average Canadian farm family today. We want to show what this situation means for the country as a whole if we do not do something about it in the short term, immediately, as well as over the long term.

Over the summer and autumn I had the opportunity of travelling to many rural constituencies in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and particularly in Ontario and Nova Scotia. Three or four weeks ago I was in southern Saskatchewan speaking to the people who lived in that area of the province where the drought has been most severe. On the morning of September 23, I met with the mayors, reeves and councillors of all municipal organizations within 50 or 60 miles of the Town of Assiniboia. I was later in Laflèche, Gravelbourg and, of course, later that evening in Moose Jaw. The next morning in Regina I presented on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, a 10-point program which we forwarded to the Minister, as well as bringing it to the attention of the Canadian people, concerning what needed to be done to meet a very grave problem. Because of this growing crisis I have also asked the Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster), this Party's agricultural critic, to head a task force made up of three other Liberal Members who will call upon the expertise across western Canada this autumn, and then move into Atlantic Canada, Ontario and Quebec early in the spring, to meet with farm families, producer groups and provincial organizations in order to get firsthand the feeling of these people who live on and derive their livelihood from the land, regarding the response they want from this Parliament and demand from the Minister of Agriculture.

● (1220)

I can say quite frankly to the Minister that the farmers are not impressed with what the federal Government is doing; nor are they very happy with what their provincial Governments are doing. I am now talking particularly about western Canada. The mayors, reeves and councillors whom I met in Assiniboia were disillusioned and disgusted with the response they were receiving from their provincial and federal counterparts. They are concerned that attention is not being paid to their problems by the people of Canada of Canada through their Government.

I know it is true that the Conservative Government fulfilled a few of the pledges it made to the Canadian farmer during the election. The most important commitment that it fulfilled,

the capital gains tax exemption, affects the transmission of farm land from one owner to another. That may be helpful to farmers who want to get out of farming, but it is certainly not helpful to farmers who want to stay in farming and live on the land, and it is certainly not helpful to the young men and women who have no forbears who had lived on the land and who want to make farming their career.

Western farmers, particularly in the southern parts of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, have now faced a second consecutive year of drought. More than that, the farms have been ravaged by grasshoppers. I would like to try to focus the attention of the country on the situation and, hopefully, to elicit a response from the Minister that will go some way to meeting the crisis. As I said in Regina, the Minister can take the credit for the 10-point program which we outlined there because it has gone beyond the political manoeuvres which are sometimes played in the House of Commons.

The problem, of course, runs deeper than drought and the vagaries of the weather. Some farmers in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba have now suffered five or six successive crop failures, but the general crisis affects farmers from coast to coast. It goes far beyond the so-called marginal farmer or the farmer who may be a bad manager. It touches many farmers who should be strong, viable operators but who now find themselves up against the wall, largely through no fault of their own. Some studies suggest that as many as one-third of our farmers are now in serious financial difficulty. Speaking in human and social terms, what is even more important is the fundamental unit of Canadian agriculture which has given a great deal of stability to this country since the time of the homesteader. The Canadian family farm is in deep, deep trouble.

The impact does not stop at the farm gate. The rural municipalities of western Canada are dependent upon the farm community and are in trouble as well. Their tax bases are eroding. Equipment dealers, car dealers and suppliers are in trouble. The situation is contagious, it is escalating, and it needs and immediate response from the Government.

There is also a human problem. Emotional stress is being placed on farmers. They are used to the usual problems of the weather and the vagaries of the international markets and have understood that it is a life that demands independence, integrity and self-reliance. The average farmer can take that, but he cannot take the combination of problems that is making it absolutely impossible to stay on the land. It is provoking problems with self-confidence, the family, and the ability of the farmer to persuade his children to take over the farm and carry it on as a family livelihood.

There are four factors to the problem. I mentioned the weather first. We have had a drought in southern Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba for two successive years. We have had the grasshoppers. The Government says that it has been studying the problems, but it should have taken action months ago to come to grips with it. Yesterday the Minister of State responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board (Mr. Mayer) invoked the provisions of the Prairie Grain Advance Payments