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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Support for Farmers

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, October 6, 2010

THE SENATE

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the situation in Alberta is as dire as Saskatchewan. Statistics Canada has confirmed that the number of cattle declined by 5.6 per cent in Alberta this year. The number of family farms raising cattle in the Western provinces is estimated to have dropped by 3.5 per cent. Farmers have to sell off some of their mother cows and calf crops to feed the remaining herds.

Let me remind this chamber that the agriculture and agri-food industry forms the foundation of many of Canada's rural communities and rural economies, employing nearly 2 million Canadians and representing 9 per cent of the gross domestic product.

Are our Western Canadian farmers a priority for this Conservative government?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, incidentally, Senator Tardif cited a report of Statistics Canada, for which I believe the information was provided to them voluntarily.

In any event, I have answered the question already. We have an outstanding Minister of Agriculture, who is a Western farmer. In my answer to Senator Peterson, if the honourable senator was listening, I quoted the head of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

I can say unequivocally that this government, especially the Minister of Agriculture, is fully committed to dealing with the

situation facing not only the wheat and oil seeds industry but also the dairy and beef industry in the West.

Senator Tardif: The government's relief package comes to about \$50 per head. According to some Alberta farmers, this amount covers approximately one month of feed. That relief is clearly insufficient.

When will the leader's government commit to supporting these important players in our economy by increasing the financial aid of their relief package and by implementing a more effective federal initiative?

Senator LeBreton: I think the head of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association said it best. Obviously, Senator Tardif is quoting people who feel that the payment is not sufficient. I would have to check the basis of those claims, honourable senators.

All I can say, as I mentioned in my answer to Senator Peterson, is that significant funds have been expended not only by the federal government, but by all three provincial governments — Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba — in dealing with the situation. Of course, Senator Tardif's question was specific to Alberta.

The situation is unusual this year for the Prairies because of the flooding. As the head of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association said, the government is in there working with the producers and the farmers. If there is further information with regard to the cattle industry, I will be happy to provide it to honourable senators.