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Specific Programs for Agriculture

AN ADDRESS BY

Hon. E. C. Manning

and

Hon. Harry Strom

Minister of Agriculture

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Hon. E. C. Manning:

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before we go into the subject matter of our discussion, I would like to thank you for your letters. We are receiving a goodly number of communications and are endeavouring to get answers to you as quickly as we can. Again, we invite all who have questions you would like to ask and matters you would like to have discussed, to write us and let us know, and we will do our best to get you the information.

I would like to have a little discussion on the all-important matter of Agriculture. As you all know, Agriculture is tied with the Petroleum industry — they are the two largest revenue-producing industries in this Province. In addition to that, of course, Agriculture is related to the whole rural life of Alberta. In recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of people occupying farms in this Province, as elsewhere in Canada. It is significant that the total production continues to increase, and certainly Alberta farmers are doing a tremendous job. They have their problems — we are well aware of this. The price-cost squeeze is giving all of our farmers a great deal of concern. However, your Government is doing everything it can to help encourage and assist the Agricultural industry to maintain a strong position in the light of the problems that it has to face.

I am very glad to have with me tonight, the Hon. Mr. Strom, your Provincial Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Strom, we are delighted to have you on the program. Perhaps you would like to say a few words to introduce this whole general subject of Agriculture.

Hon. H. E. Strom:

Yes, it is very nice to be here, and to say a word on behalf of Agriculture. We recognize that Agriculture plays a very important part in the economy of our Province. For example, in 1966, the gross earnings for farmers was just about \$800 million; and every dollar earned by a farmer generates up to seven dollars' worth of business; and so one can readily see that this plays a very important part in the economy of Agriculture, and the economy of the Province in general.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

Mr. Strom, let's begin with some of the specifics of the Department of Agriculture that you head. I am sure our viewers would be interested if you told them a little about the basic principles of operation that you follow in the Department.

Hon. H. E. Strom:

The basic principle in our Department is to get the maximum productivity of food products through proper development and conservation of both the physical and the human resources involved. Our aim is to motivate the farmer to improve the methods of production in the best way possible for his own benefit, and also for the benefit of the people of our Province in general.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

In the Department, you have quite a number of definite and specific programs which relate to different phases of our Agricultural economy. I know one of these is the Alberta Research Trust Fund and I am sure our viewers would be interested in some information on that.

Hon. H. E. Strom:

Yes, the Alberta Research Trust Fund was set up in 1966. Our Province placed \$500,000 in the Fund to get it operative, and we have guaranteed that we will match on a dollar-for-dollar basis any gifts that will be made for research in our Province, with a minimum of \$100,000 being given by the Treasury, and up to a maximum of \$200,000. I am pleased to be able to report that, at the present time, we have 45 projects which are being researched by our University; and I might point out that most of these research projects are projects that have a direct relationship to problems in which farmers are definitely interested, and from the results of which they would receive direct benefit. We believe that this will be a good, continuing program in the years to come.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

To take care of the local problems in Agriculture that your Department is equipped to deal with, you have a number of Regional offices around the Province. Would you care to say something about these?

Hon. H. E. Strom:

Yes, we have, of course, in our Extension Branch the District Agriculturists' offices which have been located in strategic locations for a number of years; but in addition to this, we have divided the Province into seven regions, and in each one of these regions it is our plan to set up a Regional office. This will be done within the next five years. At the present time, we expect that they will be located in Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge, Stettler, Vermilion, Edmonton, and in the north country, up at Fairview.

The purpose of these Regional offices is to provide for specialists' advice; and at each one of these Regional offices, when we get them fully staffed, we would expect to have an Agricultural Engineer, a Livestock specialist, a Field Crops specialist. There would be a Water Resources Engineer, and any other specialists that are related to those we now have at headquarters. It is a little difficult for farmers to get the services of these people, if they have to write to headquarters and then wait for a man to come out to their area. We believe that providing Regional offices will make it much easier for us to provide the type of service that our farmers are interested in getting and which they need under the type of farm management and farm practices that they have to use in today's operation.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

The fact that these specialists' services will be available in the local communities is certainly going to mean a great deal to our farmers and I do hope that all of them who need such services will take advantage of these facilities as they are being provided.

Anyone who has had any experience in Agriculture knows that one of the other big problems which agriculturists face (and perhaps this is especially true of those who are raising livestock) is the problem of disease, and the proper diagnosis of disease. You are launching an extensive program in the way of laboratories and diagnostic services of this kind. This is information in which I am sure our viewers would be interested.

Hon. H. E. Strom:

Yes, for quite a number of years we have had the Diagnostic Laboratory located here in the City of Edmonton. About two years ago, we completed a new building in the City of Lethbridge to provide a service for the farmers in the south. We have also made provision for the building of a Diagnostic Laboratory at Fairview in order to provide the same type of service for the farmers in the northern part of the Province.

In addition to this, we are building a new Consolidated Laboratory here in the City of Edmonton that will replace our old Diagnostic Laboratory. In the Consolidated Laboratory it is our intention to provide better facilities for soil and feed testing, also continuing with our diagnostic service as we had in the old Laboratory. We intend to provide space for the Provincial Analyst. Lands and Forests will also have space for their Fish and Wildlife Services. We think that altogether we will be able to provide a very fine service through our Consolidated Laboratory that will be of much greater benefit to farmers than the old service has been.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

Here again, I think we should stress, Mr. Strom, that while we can provide these services, and while they are invaluable to farmers, they really do the farmer little good unless he takes advantage of the facilities and the services that are made available to him. I do hope that those of you who are connected with Agriculture or the Livestock business, will remember that these services are there for you to use, and that you won't hesitate to take full advantage of what is being provided.

Probably the biggest single concern which farmers have today is in the field of marketing the products they produce. Our farmers have been able to greatly increase their production, but it is in the field of marketing, where they have to compete in a world market with world prices, that they are facing perhaps their greatest single difficulty. We have tried to help a little in that direction by providing legislation for Agricultural Marketing Boards and other facilities of this kind. I am sure our farmers would be interested in any comments that you have to make on this, Mr. Strom.

Hon. H. E. Strom:

I would have to say that it is certainly true that one of the areas in which Agriculture is having its greatest problems is in the area of marketing. Under our Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, it was only possible to establish Marketing Boards or to let them remain as they were until we passed our amendments of a year ago. At that time, we made it possible for farmers to set up either Marketing Boards, or a Marketing Commission for the purpose of promotion and advertising, or a Commission that would establish selling agencies. This has now given the farmers a considerable amount of choice, and I think that also by the setting up of our Marketing Council, we have made it possible to deal with these areas in which farmers have experienced a considerable number of problems. At the present time, we have three Marketing Boards already operating — one for vegetables, another one for broilers and the third one for turkeys. We also have a Potato Commission operating at this time. I believe that by these groups working very closely with our Marketing Council, they have been able to solve

some of the problems that were facing them in the field of marketing, and I am convinced that we will be having to do more in this area to help our farmers.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

One of the important activities in the field of Agriculture on which I would like to have you say a few words before we close, is the matter of ARDA. We have quite a large number of ARDA projects in this Province, and it is certainly playing an ever-increasing role in Agriculture. Would you care to tell us a little about that before we close?

Hon. H. E. Strom:

Yes, I am convinced that ARDA is able to perform a real function in the area of Rural Development projects. As you know, we have one that has been in operation for some time, in Census Division 14, that is known as the Edson Pilot project. In this particular area, we have been able to carry out a number of studies and we are now entering into that period of time when we are seeing Action Programs taking place. One of the concerns that we have had is how we would get Action Programs. I am very happy to be able to report to the people of our Province that we are getting action started at the local level. We have also set up Rural Development Projects in Census Division 12, and studies are currently under way, and we are also proceeding with studies in Census Division 15. It is my hope that as the work continues under ARDA Rural Development Projects, we will be able to greatly assist farmers who have specific problems with farm consolidation — perhaps they wish

to dispose of their farms and get re-training. In all of these areas we now have Action Programs that are working very well in Census Division 14, and I am sure these will also develop in the other two areas.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

Thank you very much, Mr. Strom. I wish we had time to talk a little bit about the social aspects of rural communities and farm life because, after all, it is the rural communities which give that permanent stability that is so important to the society of any country in the world today.