

Funding announcement gets mixed reaction from farmers

By ROBIN DOWNTON-POIRIER
Special to The Champion

The head of the Halton Federation of Agriculture says the federal government's recent announcement of \$1 billion in assistance for farmers is a strong indication that the government is taking the agricultural crisis seriously.

"The federal assistance is definitely a step in the right direction," said John Opsteen, president of the Halton Federation of Agriculture and a Nassagaweya chicken farmer. "It will help farmers pay some bills and get caught up. It also shows that the government is taking the issue seriously and will work on a long-term solution. There's a willingness on their behalf to help."

But other local farmers, like Bob Merry, aren't quite so optimistic and feel that it's just a short-term solution to a much bigger problem.

"This is just another bandage to guarantee cheap food for the consumer for another year," said Mr. Merry of Merrybrook Farms in Milton. "There's no problem solved whatsoever. This assistance will likely just help some farmers keep afloat a little longer instead of going bankrupt."

Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Andy Mitchell said that the Farm Income Payment

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BOB MERRY

governments will match the federal government's announcement on a 60/40 basis.

Looking toward long-term solutions, three Halton farmers contacted by The Champion expressed concerns that Canada isn't able to compete fairly in agricultural markets with other countries that offer high subsidies to their farmers, thereby allowing them to sell their commodities at a cheaper rate.

"We need a level playing field to compete fairly with other countries," said Mr. Merry. "We can't compete with countries that are heavily subsidized and can sell their products at a much lower rate than ours. Make the playing field level and we (Canada) could compete with any of them."

Another long-term solution, agreed Mr. Merry and Mr. Opsteen, is Canada becoming self-sufficient and reducing our reliance on other countries to process and sell our commodities.

"I think a domestic food source is very important to make Canada's agriculture industry viable," said Mr. Opsteen. "Long-term solutions are possible but it's going to take serious money and serious respect from the government, both of which they've already showed."

For more information on the Farm Income Payment Plan, visit the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Web site at www.agr.gc.ca.

Program will begin delivering money to eligible farmers in April as part of a two-part plan to ease immediate financial pressures and look at ways to transform the agriculture industry by finding the root of the problem.

The assistance program will be based on the same eligibility criteria as the Transitional Industry Support Program (TISP) that gave \$930 million to farmers last year to ease pressures. Farmers who participated in TISP will be automatically enrolled in the Farm Income Payment Plan.

It's also hoped that the provincial

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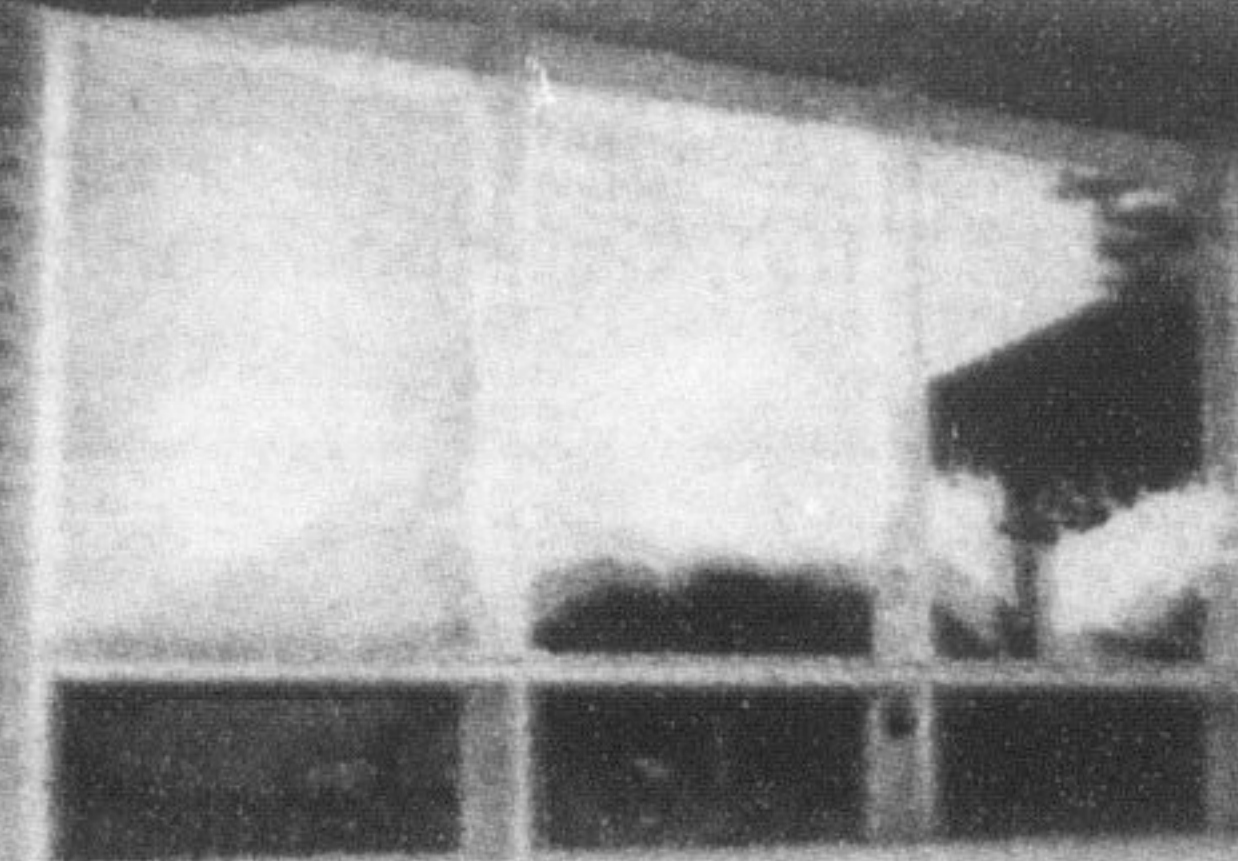
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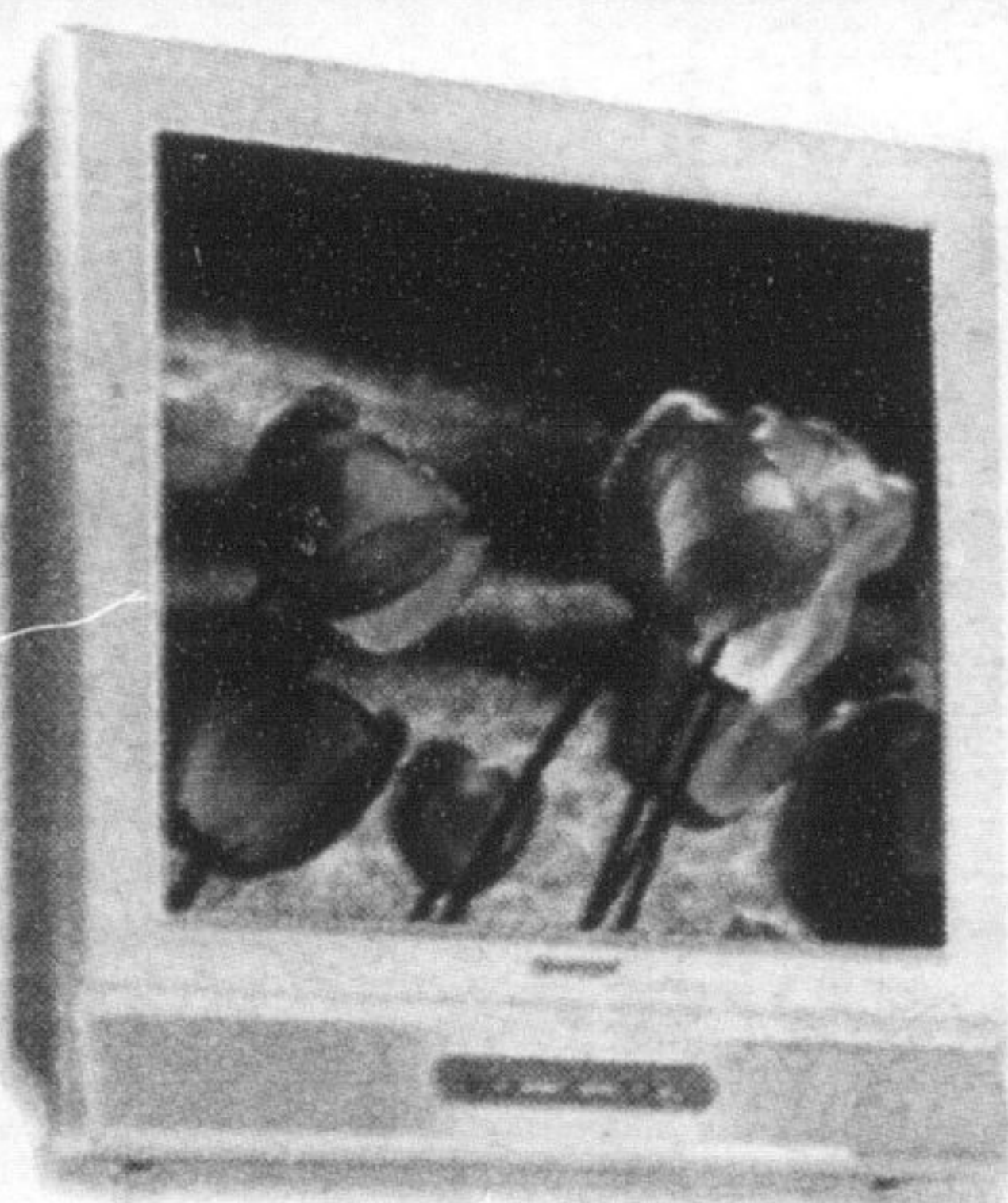
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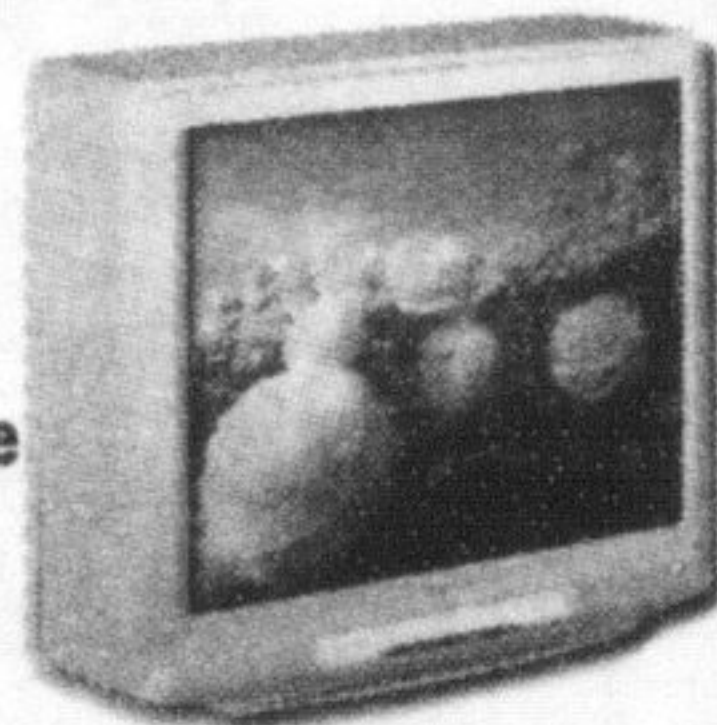


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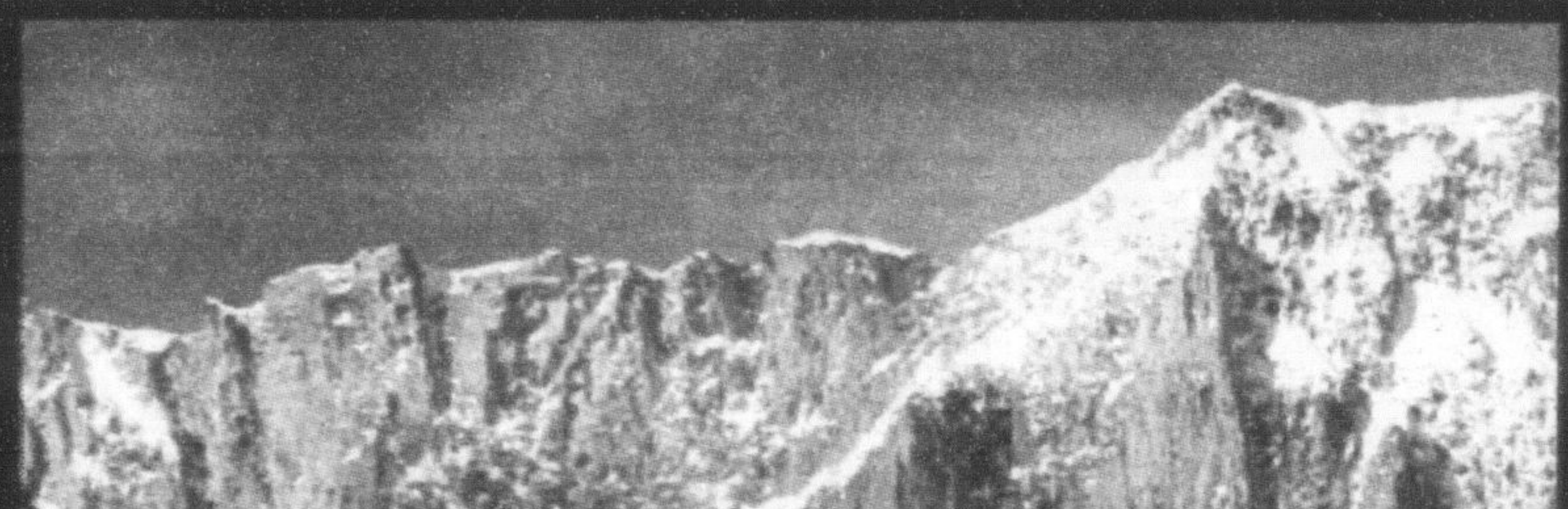
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