

Hon. J. G. GARDINER (Minister of Agriculture): Before proceeding to a general discussion of the estimates, I desire to call the attention of the committee to the item with which we were dealing at adjournment last night, and I do so in order to complete the record on this subject. The question under discussion at that time was the purchasing of horses, and had I been listening more carefully at the beginning I would have directed the attention of the hon. member who was discussing the matter to what he himself suggested, namely, that it should properly have been taken up under the special items towards the end of my estimates rather than as a matter of general discussion. Had that course been followed I should have had the facts with me last night and I could have given a more intelligent answer to what was said. I did, however, give a general outline of the plans which have been made with regard to the purchase of horses, and the results of those plans, and some of the facts in connection with what has been done to date were brought out in the return which was put on the record the other day at the request of the member for Wood Mountain.

I desire to summarize the results of that return. It shows that from August 16 to August 25 we purchased horses at about a dozen points along the eastern side of Saskatchewan in order that we might gain some experience in the methods to be followed before embarking upon the purchase of horses in the drought area, which after all was the area we desired to get into and in which to make considerable purchases if possible before winter. On August 25 we began to purchase horses in the south at Weyburn. We followed through at twenty-odd different points from August 25 until September 8, purchasing at different points throughout the southern part of Saskatchewan and at two points in Alberta, namely Monitor and Consort. In other words, by September 8 we had just entered upon the purchase of horses in the drought area of Alberta and had covered a very considerable part of Saskatchewan.

So far as my own records show, we had only two complaints in writing regarding the activities of the purchasers. One of them came from LaFleche, and the other from Coronach, which is down in the same part of the province. The complaint with regard to LaFleche did not come direct from LaFleche to me but from the Minister of Agriculture in Saskatchewan, Mr. McIntosh. I have his letter before me and mine in reply. The letter which Mr. McIntosh wrote me contained most of the complaints which were given by the hon. member for Wood Mountain last night. I

think they were largely taken from a newspaper which is published in LaFleche.

In view of some of the things which were said last night I think probably it would be advisable for me to place on record the letter which I wrote to Mr. McIntosh dealing with that particular matter, because it covers the points which were raised in a manner which will not only be an explanation but will probably give some information. Mr. McIntosh wired me on September 24 setting forth that there had been complaints in from LaFleche. I wired him stating that we had no complaints here and asked him for information. He then wrote me under date of October 24 giving me approximately the information contained in what was placed on *Hansard* by the hon. member for Wood Mountain last night; and on October 27 I wrote him as follows:

Hon. L. F. McIntosh,
Minister of Agriculture,
Regina, Sask.

Dear Mr. McIntosh:

I have yours of October 24. Your letter is the first intimation I have had as to what the alleged difficulties were at LaFleche. I shall, of course, have the matter looked into and receive a report from those who were conducting this purchase.

If the story as told by your correspondent is correct, it bears out the fears which I expressed to you and Mr. Auld during our interview at the beginning of the plan. You will recall that after your man had made some arrangements for the bringing together of horses in this manner as a result of consultation with some of our representatives, I expressed the view that the plan would not work to the satisfaction of anyone. Although we called off the first arrangement, there was some disagreement with me on this, with the result that we tried it out in a few places. I do not think that there was entire satisfaction anywhere.

Some of the difficulty was caused by the fact that we were not able to get a final signing of the French contract, and have not been able to get it signed even up to date. It was the French who desired to have the lighter horses—the Netherlands wanted heavier horses. Because this contract was not signed it was impossible for the lighter horses to be purchased.

I quite agree with those who complain that if it were at all possible to do so farmers should have been informed in advance of the change, but you will realize that to do this would have been most difficult. As a matter of fact, it is just a further indication that the plan which was evolved will not work satisfactorily.

About the same time that this sale was held information was received that boats could not be secured to ship more horses at present. For this reason the whole plan has been called off until next spring. I can assure you that whether all claims made with regard to the LaFleche experience are correct or not, we have had sufficient experience with the plan itself to know that it will not operate satisfac-