

Supply—Agriculture

matters, that the tomato crop in Essex county was in a class by itself. That, however, is not the point. The point is that in the past two or three years the farmers in Essex county, and in a special way in that portion which I have the honour of representing, have been confronted by the Heinz Company and the canneries generally with a forced reduction in the acreage of tomato growing. This represents a very great loss to the farmers of our county.

The minister may say that all this item deals with is not a reduction of acreage but a situation where there is a surplus of production. That would be a fair comment. Now there would be in my area a surplus of production if it were not for this enforced cut by the canneries and others in the acreage devoted to tomato production. Is there anything which this board could do, in the opinion of the minister, to find ways and means of allowing at least normal acreage production to develop; to find ways and means of taking care of the difference in production between what the canneries need and what the farmers are able to produce?

At Easter time I met with a large group of farmers in my own constituency on this problem and I met with farmers in one or two other counties last fall. There is genuine concern about this matter. I am wondering if this particular products board could not be invited by the suggestion I am making, if it has any merit, to look into this problem which concerns a large group of farmers and which I am sure applies not only to Essex county but also to Kent and perhaps even to Lambton but in a special way to the county of Essex.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, this board has no function whatever in that regard. It is purely what you might call a merchandising board set up by the government of which the hon. gentleman was a member for the specific purpose of buying or selling agricultural commodities on behalf of the government. As I indicated, it has been used only to a limited extent for that purpose.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Would there be any other agency that could undertake this?

Mr. Harkness: As far as the general question raised by the hon. member is concerned, there seems to be a general impression on his part and on the part of some other hon. members that the amount of canning of tomatoes has been reduced materially in Canada. That is not in accord with the facts. Tomato canning has been materially reduced in British Columbia but not in Ontario. The

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

actual figures for the amount of tomatoes canned in the years 1954 to the present time are as follows:

Year	Amount
1954	43.5 million pounds
1955	85.9 million pounds
1956	86.9 million pounds
1957	76.6 million pounds
1958	76.7 million pounds
1959	78.6 million pounds

In spite of the fact that there has been a material reduction in British Columbia, canning last year was nearly twice what it was in 1954. It was a little less than in 1955 and 1956 but more than in 1957 or 1958.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I appreciate the correctness of the statistics the minister has given but I do not think they alter the point I made. Large canning companies in my county did advise the farmers last year that because they had a surplus of tomato pulp they would simply not require the same acreage production, let us say of a year previous. I went to one of these large canneries myself and having seen the storage of the large quantity of tomato pulp I could quite understand the position that was taken. As a result, however, there was a substantial cut in the acreage. In the case of one company it involved as many as 3,000 farmers. That is a serious situation in any county. What the minister says about the increase in population and additional uses for the product is probably true but it does not alter the fact that the situation as I have indicated exists. I direct this matter to the attention of the minister and his officials in the hope that they will find it possible to give close examination to this problem.

Mr. Harkness: We would be glad to look into the matter but I think the hon. member realizes that in an economy such as ours we cannot force companies to take larger acreages of tomatoes than they are prepared to purchase. The production in fruits and vegetables varies up and down quite a bit. The figures I read indicate that in 1954 there were only 43.5 million pounds of tomatoes canned and the next year there were twice that many, 85.9 million pounds. That is just in the nature of the business. It varies up and down from year to year, sometimes to a marked degree.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): But if, for instance, there were a surplus of production, let us say in Essex county, it might be possible to take care of the shortage that exists as reflected in the imports from California into British Columbia. I know that my hon. friend would not want to see Essex county