

No doubt in war time that is necessary. How is it that the price in Ontario of 30 cents for fresh fruit is dropped to 19 cents?

Mr. ABBOTT: Thirty cents.

Mr. CRUICKSHANK: The price of 30 cents in Ontario is dropped to 19 cents after June 24. The hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard was challenged yesterday by the Minister of Finance, but he was correct; he knew what he was talking about. They want the cream at all times. Why the increase to 30 cents and then the drop to 19 cents? I should like the parliamentary assistant to explain why that is. I will prove my point by their own figures.

When the time comes for canning, Ontario must import processed berries from British Columbia. The manufacturer in British Columbia can pay up to 12 cents per pound after that date, but of course he is not going to pay that for jam berries. For argument's sake say that he pays 10 cents a pound, but 12 cents is the maximum he is allowed to pay. He will offer 10 cents a pound and say, "Take it or leave it; I have to compete with the cheap labour and cheap manufacture in the east." We are compelled to ship our processed berries to eastern Canada. I am not quarrelling with that because at the present time we do not have the manufacturing facilities in British Columbia. It is a peculiar fact that when you follow that through you find that 30 cents is being paid in Ontario with its cheap labour, and then 19 cents when they want to manufacture. It should be noted that at December 31, 1943, there were 8,200,000 pounds of fruit pulp in British Columbia as against 3,800,000 pounds in 1942. I doubt if any of the great producers' organizations in British Columbia were consulted. I doubt if any hon. member from British Columbia was consulted in connection with this price ceiling for berries. I doubt very much if the jam manufacturers of British Columbia were not consulted before this figure was arrived at. I want the parliamentary assistant to explain to me how they arrived at this. Was the cost of production taken into consideration? Were the jam manufacturers consulted before the ceiling was set?

Mr. ABBOTT: I thought we had our strawberry festival yesterday. I am afraid I am not very well prepared to deal with the questions my hon. friend has asked. As I recall, he asked how the price was arrived at. It was arrived at by the fruits and vegetable administration, of which his fellow British Columbian, Mr. Chambers, is the administrator. I am informed that it was arrived at after consultation with the officials of the department of agriculture of British Columbia

and after Mr. Chambers had visited that province. That was so far as the price in that part of Canada is concerned.

Mr. SENN: Was the horticultural council called in?

Mr. ABBOTT: I cannot say.

Mr. CRUICKSHANK: May I ask a question?

Mr. ABBOTT: Perhaps I could cover the points raised by my hon. friend.

The CHAIRMAN: The parliamentary assistant should be allowed to give his answer.

Mr. ABBOTT: I was just trying to cover the other question which was asked. The hon. member asked how the price was arrived at, and I pointed out that consultations had taken place before that price was fixed. As the minister said yesterday, the 1943 crop in British Columbia was about one-quarter of normal. Speaking from memory, it was some 2,500,000 quarts as against about 5,500,000 quarts for the year before and some 10,000,000 quarts for the preceding year. There was no price ceiling on berries last year, and to use a slang phrase, the berry growers in British Columbia went to town with their prices. I do not blame them, but the fact is that they got a very good price for their berries last year. There was no ceiling in effect and average price received in 1943 by the berry growers of British Columbia was 33 cents per quart as against 12 cents per quart the preceding year.

Mr. CRUICKSHANK: Do I understand you to say that the average price received for all berries was 33 cents?

Mr. ABBOTT: I am informed that the Dominion of Canada Department of Agriculture reports show that the average price received in 1943 by the growers in British Columbia was 33 cents a quart as against an average price of 12 cents a quart in 1942. In other words, it was better than two and a half times the price received in the preceding year, and, as the minister indicated yesterday, about four times the average price for the preceding four years.

I think the cost of production of agricultural products is probably one of the hardest things to determine, but it is a pretty fair indication as to whether a return is reasonable when the price set is double the prices received over an average period. It is true that the ceiling price fixed this year for British Columbia strawberries is about nine or ten cents below the 1943 prices, but, as I have indicated, those prices were more than double the 1942 prices. In the judgment of the board, and