

CANADA & RURAL HOME

We Welcome Practical Progressive Ideas.

Trade increases the wealth and glory of a country; but its real strength and stamina are to be looked for among the cultivators of the land.—Lord Chatham

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Should Farmers Embark in Trading Operations?

What the Business Interests Think About It. What the Farmers Reply. The Question Debated at a Joint Conference of Farmers and Business Men.—H. Bronson Cowan, Editor in Chief of Farm and Dairy.

THE whole question of the advisability of farmers undertaking trading organizations among themselves, including their right to do so, how far they should go in this direction and what the results of such action are likely to be, was debated at a joint conference held by representatives of the organized farmers of Ontario and the West and of the business interests of Western Canada, held in the Parliament Buildings, Regina, March 13 and 14th. The conference throughout was an interesting one. The discussions were conducted in the best of spirits. The farmers have reason to feel satisfied with their presentation of their side of the case. It was so strong that representatives of the business interests frankly complimented them upon the manner in which they had made and sustained their points.

From the outset of the farmers' movement business interests have not hesitated to attempt to block the efforts of the farmers to undertake trading operations among themselves. This was true in the early days of the movement in western Canada. It is equally true of the farmers' movement in Ontario to-day. In fact, opposition still exists in the west as well as in the east, in the interests of the farmers to extend their business activities.

This opposition has manifested itself in various ways. Manufacturers and wholesalers often refuse to sell to the farmers' organizations. When they do sell, they sometimes quote lower rates to the local farmers' clubs than to the central, with the object of making local dissatisfaction with their central organization and thereby breaking up the whole movement.

In Ontario as well as in the west, the retail merchants' associations have strenuously opposed efforts of the farmers to secure acts from the Provincial Legislatures, as well as from the Dominion House of Commons, that would tend to promote co-operative effort by farmers. They have threatened to boycott manufacturers and wholesalers who sell to farmers' organizations. Country merchants and dealers sometimes undersell their local farmers' clubs at a loss to themselves with the object of creating dissatisfaction among members of the clubs and breaking up their organization.

These facts are well known both to the organized farmers and to the business interests. It was natural, therefore, that a discussion of the subject at such a meeting as was held in Regina would be full of interest. Probably for the first time in Canada, the subject was discussed by representative leaders on both sides. While there was a good deal of sparing for position, and while no conclusive decisions as to future policy were reached, still the result of the conference should serve to give each side a better understanding of the other's difficulties and position.

What the Council is.

First of all, let me explain the character of the Joint Council of Commerce and Agriculture. Readers of Farm and Dairy may remember the meeting held in Winnipeg some two years ago by representatives of the business interests and farmers at which the Council was formed. Owing largely to the growing strength of the farmers' movement in Western Canada, a conviction sprang up among leading business men in the West in the fall of 1915, that an effort should be made to bring about a better understanding between the farmers and the business interests. Representatives of the large business organizations in the west met and decided to invite the farmers to a joint conference. They felt that there were many ways in which they could help the farmers, and that they were most willing to do if they could. They believed that it would be dangerous to discuss matters likely to be controversial, such as the tariff, and said so, but were willing to discuss other mat-

ters likely to be of mutual interest and benefit.

A long list of subjects which they felt they would like to discuss, was prepared by them and submitted to the farmers. There can be no doubt that at that time they did not fully appreciate the fact that the farmers in Western Canada have some of the ablest businessmen in the Dominion in their organizations, and that they have grown past the stage where they need help from other business interests, with men in other lines of industry in ways that will be mutually advantageous.

The conference was held in due course. The farmers quickly played havoc with the proposals made by the business interests. They made it clear that they would not agree to confer with them if values, which they considered to be of paramount importance, could not be discussed. They showed, also, that they felt perfectly capable of taking care of matters purely agricultural in character, and that they did not desire assistance from outside sources. The business men quickly saw the mistake they had made, graciously admitted it, and conceded the points demanded by the farmers. The result was that there was then formed what is known as the Joint Council of Commerce and Agriculture. The

Council is composed of an equal number of representatives of the big business organizations of the west, some of which, like the banks, railway companies and manufacturing industries, have their headquarters in the east. Several meetings of the Council have been held during the past few years and beneficial results have followed from the meetings.

The Regina Meeting.

The meeting in Regina gave clear evidence of the progress that has been made towards bringing about a better understanding between the two sides. There was not the slightest indication on the part of the business interests that they wanted to help the farmers. Instead their whole attitude showed clearly that they now realize that the farmers are perfectly well able to take care of themselves. On the other hand, the farmers were not so suspicious as they were two years ago, that the business men were trying to put something over on them, and thereby possibly weakening the farmers' movement. In the interval both sides have grown to respect and have greater confidence in each other.

Those Who Were Present.

First of all, who were present? The farmers were represented by some 25 members of the Canadian Council of Agriculture who had been in session the two days previous, in the offices of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Co. Those present included H. W. Wood, of Calgary, the President of the Council of Agriculture and of the United Farmers of Alberta; J. A. Maharg, M.P., of Moose Jaw, the president of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, and of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Co., Limited; R. C. Henders, M.P., the president of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association; C. Rice-Jones, the vice-president of the United Grain Growers, Limited, of Winnipeg and Calgary; J. Murray, the manager of the United Grain Growers, Limited; F. Riddell, the manager of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company; J. J. Morrison, of Toronto, the secretary of the United Farmers' Cooperative Company, Limited; and other leaders in the farmers' movement. There were also present from Ontario, J. N. Cornish, of Goderich; and H. B. Cowan, of Farm and Dairy.

The business interests represented were the banks, railway companies, loan and trust corporations, the Retail Merchants' Association, the insurance companies, boards of trade, and other similar organizations. Dr. J. B. Rutherford, former Dominion Live Stock Commissioner and now in charge of the Live Stock Department of the Canadian Pacific Railway with headquarters in Calgary, made a most capable chairman. He was eminently fair, witty, and tactful in all his rulings.

Farmers' Trading Organizations.

At the request of the business interests, it had been arranged in advance to hold a discussion in regard to the trading operations of the farmers. Mr. C. Rice-Jones, on behalf of the farmers, had prepared in advance, a statement, setting forth the reasons which had led farmers to undertake trading operations. This article was published in full in the March 21st issue of Farm and Dairy. In brief, Mr. Rice-Jones claimed that farmers were forced to conduct trading operations in order to reduce the cost of their supplies which were unduly high because of the multiplicity of local stores, the lack of business training on the part of many country merchants, the tendency of merchants to charge unreasonable and unjust prices, the lack of business sense and uncut prices, the practice on the part of merchants of charging farmers, willing to pay cash, the same price for their goods as farmers who bought on credit, and the practice of merchants in charging as

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ALFALFA

PLOW the furrow wide and deep,
Run it true and turn it fair,
Far across the sloping sweep,
As the team rolls from the share
Polishing the mold-board bright
Till it glitters in the light.

Follow quickly with the harrow;
Crush the clods, and fine the soil,
While the untamed strip grows narrow
On the sweating herds toe soil.
Harrow quickly, lest it harden;
Fine the soil as for a garden.

Sow the seed, and let it slumber,
Warmed by sun and drenched by rain,
Till the days in steter sleep,
Waken it to life again,
Then unfolds before our eyes
One of nature's mysteries.

On the slope where first was showing
Just a shimmering haze of green,
Day by day the shoots are growing
Till no sign of soil is seen;
And the beauty is revealed
Of a June alfalfa field.

Thicker grow than meadow-grasses,
Firm and fixed it seems to be,
But when morning's swift wind passes,
It's a restless moving sea,
Wave on wave its fellow follows
Toward the upland from the hollows.

When the keen knives cut it down
Hope of higher yield seems vain
From a spot so bare and brown,—
Then it greens and grows again,
Thrice and four times thus it keeps
Its first promise ere it slips.

—ELDRIDGE DANISON.