

Fruit Wastage—Containers

the boundary of the Fraser Valley riding. Not only is it serious from the point of view of the inability to market these fruit and vegetables, but because there will be a shortage of food purchasable by the people themselves.

Hon. J. G. GARDINER (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, a question was asked yesterday with regard to the matter under discussion as to which some information should be placed early in this debate before members of the house. Full information with regard to the position was not at hand yesterday, but I have considerable of it here at the moment. I think the general situation is best stated in a memorandum which I have in my hand and which I will read to the house.

There are prospects that one of the largest crops on record is maturing in British Columbia at present. Cherries will be ready in about two weeks, followed by peaches, apricots and plums. These are highly perishable fruits. The apple crop is being estimated at eight million boxes. Cherry containers are in fair supply but only about one-third enough boxes for the rest of the crop, and an inadequate supply of barrels for processing. The Okanagan depends mainly on the Okanagan box shoo plants for its production. In lower Fraser Valley the deficit in the supply of containers threatens the loss of \$1,000,000 worth of fruit for which there are no barrels or crates. One company alone, the Pacific Cooperative in Mission, needs 13,000 barrels for processing small fruits and 45,000 crates for raspberries. The over-all deficit in barrels is estimated at 35,000. Each barrel contains from 350 to 400 pounds of fruit. The supply of berry crates and hallocks comes mainly from three small mills at Yarrow, Mission and Haney and from Fraser Wood Products Limited, which makes veneer. These plants are now idle or nearly so through lack of logs for veneer.

That is the general position as stated by one who is interested in the ideas which are being put before the house by the member for Fraser Valley (Mr. Cruickshank) and by others. I have taken the trouble to-day to have the position reviewed by officials of the department, through getting in direct contact with British Columbia, and the information gathered is compiled in another memorandum, which is the result of conversations that took place within the last hour and a half. The statements made are to this effect:

Strawberries. The first picking started on May 30. From 1,500 to 2,500 crates are going to prairie markets daily. By the end of next week shipments will be up to 7,000 and 8,000 crates daily. The present supply of crates amounts to about 40,000 which are in the hands of the organized shippers. Independents are in a bad position. The estimated crop of strawberries for this year is 4,000 tons.

Raspberries. Expected to start picking about 24th June. Organized growers have between 35,000 and 40,000 crates on hand. Independent shippers are short. The estimated crop is 5,500 tons.

[Mr. Stirling.]

Barrels. The Pacific Union have on hand 13,000 barrels—5,000 new U.S., 2,000 new B.C., and 6,000 old barrels. Fraser Valley Co-Op. have all the barrels they will require for this year. Yarrow Co-op. have only about 1,000 barrels on hand and 1,000 promised. Their position is very short. New barrel requirements are in the neighbourhood of about 35,000. The actual shortage is about 21,000 barrels.

The statement is made that "we are unable to obtain or secure any more barrels from the United States at present". That is, I presume, for use in making supplies available to others than the Americans themselves, and there is no assurance that barrels would be supplied from the United States even if they were to be returned packed with berries, although it is stated there may be private commitments to that effect of which the department itself would have no information. That is the position as it is reported to us at the moment.

I do not intend this afternoon, though others may desire to do so, to discuss the pros and cons of the arguments that can be brought forward on either side of the labour dispute which is on at the moment, or to state what ought to be done in relation to it. I only point out that in the summaries I have read it is indicated that three or four companies are making containers and it would probably not be a difficult thing for someone to take control of these companies and operate them if that in itself would get the results desired. My understanding is, however, that the supplies of logs which would be required to make possible the manufacture of containers is something which goes much deeper than that and involves a problem which would have to be solved before the operation of the plants themselves would be effective.

The question which was asked yesterday, and the proposal which was made with a view to providing some solution for the difficulty, is however on a very much narrower basis than the basis upon which the discussion is taking place to-day. The member for Fraser Valley, rising in his place yesterday, stated:

I should like to direct a question to the government. I do not know which department it comes under so I have given notice to three ministers. My first question is, what steps are being taken to save thousands of tons of berries worth over a million dollars, now under contract to the United Kingdom from being lost, owing to the lack of barrels and containers?

I would like to take a few moments to deal with that first question and the background which makes it an important one.

In the first place, early in the war the British government did not desire to have fruit shipped because of the fact that it took up very considerable space and supplied less food value to those who required food than did some