

Foot-and-mouth disease

western Canada, and particularly the feeder cattle producers in that area, by providing a floor under live cattle prices.

As the situation is, if a floor is placed under the carcass it will not protect the farmers throughout the west who depend upon their income from the production of feeder cattle.

I believe, too, that at this time we should hear from the government as to what is going to be done or what has been done to assure disposal of part of our surplus beef in the United Kingdom, in view of the closing to us of the United States market. Certainly, with the United States market closed to us, and with the intensification of production that has followed from the availability of that market, we must find other markets. In dealing with this matter the minister should give the House of Commons some information which will give hope to the farmers.

The minister said the other day that there was no embargo on feed grain. There is, however, an embargo on feed grains from the area under quarantine. I believe the minister will agree with that. If the disease spreads, as so often happens; if it is carried from place to place before the application of the quarantine, then some consideration should be given by the government, in respect to the areas in question, to an advance in connection with the storage of grains, or payments for storage. These are matters affecting a large number of people in the western provinces today, although they are confined particularly to the quarantined areas. In order to make assurance doubly sure, and so that each farmer will not have to depend on the interpretation that the minister or any other member of the government may give as to the extent of the compensation, I ask that the basis, measure or yardstick of compensation shall be set forth generally in the bill and made subject only to the things that may arise which can only be provided for by regulation.

Those are in general the submissions I wish to make on behalf of the affected area in Saskatchewan. After all, it is not only a Saskatchewan problem; it is one that affects the whole of Canada. It is one that has in it potentialities of destruction of one of the great industries of this country for years to come. I am sorry to say that I have to repeat that the postponements, the failure to get serum, the waiting from week to week, even from month to month, when a total period of six days would have been all that was necessary with the serum that could have been procured, are all indications of a delay which the government has a responsibility to explain and has not yet done so.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Mr. Coldwell: I find it rather difficult to understand the Minister of Agriculture this afternoon. Usually when a matter affecting his department comes before the house he has at his fingertips all the information required. I asked certain questions, and to a large extent the hon. member for Lake Centre has given the dates about which I was inquiring. To my mind it seems almost incredible that, with the declaration that it was foot-and-mouth disease being made on February 19, the minister is unable today, the 3rd of March, to give us the story of the discovery of the disease and the quarantine orders that were issued.

Mr. Gardiner: May I be permitted to interrupt?

Mr. Coldwell: Just a minute.

Mr. Gardiner: It is right on the point you were mentioning. This morning the hon. member for Brant-Wentworth sent me a question which he intended to ask today on the orders of the day if we get to them. The question reads as follows:

When was the health of animals branch in Saskatchewan first notified of a vesicular disease in cattle? When was Ottawa notified? When did officials from Ottawa first visit the infected area? What did they report and when was the first infected material delivered to the animal diseases research institute in Hull?

I received those questions about an hour and a half before I came into the house. I asked my officials if they could give me the answers to those questions. I was told they could not possibly give them to me today before the house met, having regard to the form in which the questions were asked, but that they would get them as soon as possible. Up until the time I came into the house it was absolutely impossible for me to get information that I would stand up in the house and repeat, particularly in view of the experience I had on Friday when I attempted to answer one question without having all the facts exactly as they are.

Mr. Coldwell: Then surely that is a reflection on the minister's department. These are such grave matters that all the information regarding them should be available immediately to the minister when he asks for it. I think that all the minister has done is to indicate a tremendous amount of laxity on the part of his own department. I am most surprised because I have always had a very high respect for the people in that department. I think that the situation is so unsatisfactory with respect to the background of this disease in the province of Saskatchewan that the committee on agriculture should be set up immediately and the officials of the department called before it. Then