

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

THURSDAY, April 6, 1922.

The Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization met at 11 o'clock, the Chairman, Mr. W. F. Kay, presiding.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee will please come to order.

Gentlemen, the object of our meeting this morning is to hear the representatives of the Council of Agriculture on the memorandum which was presented to the Government and subsequently referred to this Committee on the question of the re-establishment of the Wheat Board.

Mr. Woods and Mr. Robinson of the Canadian Council of Agriculture are present this morning, and I will call upon Mr. Woods first to make whatever remarks he has to make in amplification of the memorandum.

Mr. H. W. Woods: Mr. Chairman and gentlemen: I have not a formal case to present to you this morning. Mr. Lambert presented that in writing to the Government, and I believe you have it. All I desire to do is to make a few informal statements in regard to the conditions that led up to the farmers of Western Canada requesting the re-establishment of the Wheat Board.

The conditions in Western Canada during the last two years have been exceedingly serious from a financial statement. I think I can say without any qualification that during that period all agricultural products have been selling below the cost of production. The farmers are short of money, their security is exhausted, and the situation is exceedingly serious. In fact, the farmers are in a bankrupt condition, and unless there is a change they will be completely bankrupt. Wheat being the principal commodity of the farmers in Western Canada, they determined to ask for the re-establishment of the Wheat Board, because they believe that by selling through that system they will get considerably more for their wheat. The idea has never been that they would be able to arbitrarily fix the price of wheat, but the farmers would be able to negotiate the price and control the flow of wheat and obtain a great deal more money for their crops if the Wheat Board is re-established. In other words, the farmers would be able to get the full value of their crops on the world's market. That is the only thing we hope to be able to accomplish.

The conditions that exist in connection with the selling of wheat are that as soon as the wheat commences to run in full flow—that is, as soon as the farmers all get to threshing and get the wheat rolling—it is rushed to market as rapidly as the farmers can get it there, because they are all being pushed for money. In addition to that, a very large majority of the farmers, on account of being pushed for money, order their wheat sold on arrival, and the commission men have nothing to do but sell that wheat. They have nothing to do with negotiating a price, because they have to sell the wheat at whatever price they can get when the wheat arrives; they are under orders by the owners of the wheat to sell it. The flow is not controlled, and from the settlers' standpoint the price is really not negotiated.

Under the Wheat Board an initial payment was made on the wheat, and the wheat could be put in storage and kept there as long as it was expedient to do so. The flow of wheat was thereby controlled, and there was also this central agency to

[Mr. H. W. Woods.]