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SOMETHING ABOUT THE POTATO INSPECTION IN AROOSTOOK COUNTY

Presque Isle, Me., April 10.—Does State inspection of Aroostook seed potato stock fully protect the Southern grower from the powdery scab? Will the presence of the disease in nearly all parts of Aroostook cripple the seed industry next Fall? Will the Federal Horticultural Board have to finally take charge of the matter to restore confidence among buyers? Will the present inspection prove a blessing in the end instead of a serious blow? Is the powdery scab epidemic or can the cases be isolated so that the remainder of Aroostook farms will be protected? Is there actually so much danger from this muchly exploited disease as the scientists declare, and will it, if unchecked, spread all over the country? Have the pathologists located a single potato section in the world where serious harm has resulted from powdery scab, and if so, where? Is there one man in five who can pick out the powdery scab from the common scab found in every part of America? If the disease has been known for a number of years, why was it that no quarantine was enforced on foreign potatoes in 1911-12, when the United States imported over 13,000,000 bu. from the British Isles and Europe? Why did the Federal Board wait until the duty was cut off to find out about its fearful results? Why was it that New Brunswick and Quebec were allowed dump hundreds of cars on the Maine railroads during the period between the Washington hearing and the date of the quarantine? How is it that Holland, Belgium and Denmark have been cleaned up so quickly—less than 90 days after the quarantine—if these countries had so much disease as was stated at the Washington hearing? And if Aroostook has so much of the disease, how can the Federal Board claim to be consistent in temporizing with a makeshift State inspection—an admittedly loose experiment? Is the present Aroostook inspection simply a self-instituted immunity bath to exploit Aroostook seed stock, or is it a shrewd political move by which shippers are paying out practically $2,000 @ 2,500 a week to keep a bunch of farmer inspectors employed in a dull season? Is the Federal Board keeping its eyes closed to the present actual danger while posing before the country as the great protecting governmental agency for all American potato sections? How was it that the inspection was slapped down upon Aroostook only until all but 500 cars of its seed stock had been sold and shipped—what about the 4,500 cars which had been previously shipped, not one of which had been inspected? Why was it that the big shippers had a full 30 days' notice so they could get hundreds of cars out of their warehouses into the hands of Southern growers while the stocks held by farmers in barns and cellars were caught by the inspection orders? How was it that big operators like those at Ft. Fairfield, Limestone, Van Buren and Fort Kent were able to load up their warehouses during this 30 days' delay with New Brunswick potatoes bought at the lowest price of the season? Why was it that long processions of heavily loaded wagons drawing potatoes from the suspected districts of New Brunswick were allowed to cross the border day after day during the open season to swell the shipments by Maine railroads to all the large Eastern markets. How was it that the discovery of infected potatoes in hundreds of bins in Aroostook potato houses as early Feb. 10 was kept quiet until a couple of million bushels had been rushed to markets? And then only under fear that the Federal Board would slap on a rigid quarantine? How is it that a single infected tuber will condemn a whole bin for seed stock while the farmer who may have had even dangerously affected stock can load up a car at a siding and get it into markets—no one but he knows how many scabby tubers he took out in reracking his stock at home? How is it that only Aroostook County is putting up an inspection when central and southern Maine which sections furnish a third of the State's crop, escape it? What is being done to protect Hasting, Texas, the Eastern Shore of Viginna and other great producing districts?

Aroostook Railway Only Outlet to the Markets.

These are the questions being asked on all sides by the Maine seed growers, by Maine table stock shippers, by Southern growers, and by the distributors in the large markets. To answer even few accurately would take a month's survey of the Aroostook potato situation under the most favorable conditions. Even an experienced expert could answer only a few of these common sense, practical questions. Local authorities naturally are biased—one way or the other—no two of them can agree upon any single proposition. "Down in Maine," they are not in the habit of agreeing upon anything. Aroostook a state of itself in area, is no exception. It is the home of the original, free, independent individual American. Individualism has been bred to the superlative degree, mostly due to the rigorous climate and the eight months of snow and ice each year. When the thermometer records 40@50 degrees below, a fellow has to hustle to simply keep from freezing stiff. Climate influence has made the Aroostook potato famous. And it has made the Aroostook potato grower one of the most self-centered individuals on the great foot-stool. That makes his problems hard to understand by the outsider. Even he himself fails to state them clearly when you talk to him. He knows that something is wrong—which is a good sign, and marks for progress. Self-center men usually reason through their eyes. The Bangor & Aroostook Railroad is Aroostook's only outlet to market. A corporation is supposed to be soulless—the easiest way is to blame all troubles on the B. & A. You can see the rails and the cars, and they can't hit back—a man might retaliate. Everything wrong in Aroostook is laid to the doors of the B. & A. It's a funny sort of logic, but it is fact.

Here is what a member of The News staff found after a two weeks' study of the Aroostook situation. Uninstructed, unbiased and free from any pet theories, he was sent into the greatest potato county in America to tell just what he found, to accept no statements without reasonable proof, and to search for suggestions which might be helpful in the future to the Maine potato grower, the dealer, the seed specialist and the railroads. No free lance ever accepted a commission with less restrictions. In line with the established policy of The News, this paper invested its own money to secure reliable news for its readers and to get an accurate description of actual conditions. In addition The News editor was instructed to gather data from which a logical solution of some of the Aroostook problems could be suggested to growers and shippers, whereby they could put into their pockets hundreds of thousands more dollars. This is The News policy—a service which all trade papers should furnish their patrons, subscribers and advertisers alike. The News stands out alone in this respect in the produce trade. Growers, shippers and receivers are steadily feeling its constructive policy.

State Inspection Does Not Fully Protect.

Two weeks in Aroostook personally interviewing leading seed growers, shippers and farmers and gathering data right the spot while watching the present inspection by the State, brings several conclusions. A few will answer the questions in the opening paragraph. Suggestions of a constructive character will follow.

State inspection—as now carried on—does NOT fully protect the Southern grower who depends upon Aroostook seed. The inspection tag now in use is of little value. It represents only the most casual inspection by a man, who at heart takes no stock in the powdery scab scare. He is working for his $15 or $18 per week. The State is thrifty. It charges $2 per car for inspection. The first week brought in $1,600. One inspector passed on 40 cars in a week. Each one of the 85 inspectors was chosen largely upon the recommendation of some dealer having a warehouse. Naturally he does not care to antagonize his backer. A Winter job in Maine at $3 per is not picked up every day. It must be nursed. The average inspector is humanly asking on the quiet, "How long will this job last?" A bank in trouble is not allowed to name its own clerks as examiners.

The State put one over the Federal Board when it was given full power in the Aroostook inspection. It was a shrewd political move but a poor business one. It cannot restore confidence in the purity of Aroostook seed. It gives no guarantee of freedom from powdery scab. It is a flimsy experiment. It is a miserable makeshift. The tag guarantees nothing. Read the wording: "The seed potatoes in this package (crop 1913) have been carefully inspected and are apparently free from powdery scab and have not been contaminated with powdery scab." No man knows whether it has or not. It is all a long shot chance proposition from start to finish. Farmers are commencing to haul now from cellars and barns where thousands of barrels were held for an advance. Not a barn nor a cellar appears on the list of places inspected. And only a few of the 800 houses at the 209 loading points were run over during the Feb. 16-20 inspection. Inspecting a bin of 800@1,000 bu. in 10 minutes is not much of an inspection. Yet that was the average time taken. Even at that 13 per cent of the storage on Feb. 15 was pronounced "under suspicion."

Why has the State tag no value? It bears the title "Department of Agriculture, Augusta, Me.; John A. Roberts, Commissioner of Agriculture." That is all. You can buy them in any town for 25c per 100, or $1.50 per 1,000. An unscrupulous person can buy 10,000 tags, carry them to New York or Boston and label that number of bags of table stock from which scabby tubers have been supposedly removed. Or he could tag 10,000 bags of New York, Michigan or even Belgian stock now coming into New York. The tag is no guarantee that the contents of the bag came from Aroostook. It is worthless so far as guaranteeing that the contents had not been in contact with infected tugers. And powdery scab can be distributed by sacks, by potato machines and even by the men handling the seed stock. Over 400 cars, or about 100,000 bags, of seed stock left Aroostook stations the first week of the inspection ending Mar. 14. Possibly half were tagged—not more. And not one tag bore a single mark by which the buyer could trace the origin of the goods. There is a rule now requiring the number of the inspection certificate on the back of the tag. Usually in pencil which will rub off by the time the Southern grower receives the bag. Until this was done there was no attempt to fix personal responsibility upon the inspectors. There is very little even now. The casual examination of one bag in five AFTER the stock is bagged and ready to load into cars is no inspection. Yet this condition is the rule and not the exception all over the county. A few inspectors stand by the rack while seed stock is being racked—most of them come around periodically. Inspectors, supposedly on duty, were seen on the streets, at depotes and in the hotels—in fact were pointed out by an employee of the State Board. The large seed stock shippers admit to you that they depend more upon their own men at the rack to locate scabby stuff than they do upon the inspectors. Self interest to protect their reputation makes the large seed specialists careful. In the end they will be hurt most by the presence of the powdery scab in the Aroostook fields They are clearly worried. They see that the end is not at hand. They are game and will fight for their business but they know that once Southern buyers turn from Aroostook seed the county loses a $2,500,000 annual income which has been steadily growing.

A careful study of the entire inspection program fails to show where it is of the least benefit or protection. It was put on hurriedly by men inexperienced in such matters. It is being enforced by men few of whom take any stock in the talk of danger to Southern growers or to Aroostook county. There is no way to check up the inspector and once the car starts South, scab or no scab, the contents reach the buyer. As an experiment it is a flat failure and a serious indictment of the Federal Board which was keen to shut out foreign stock professedly to protect the Maine supply. Then the doors were closed to New Brunswick, causing joy in Maine. But when it came to Federal supervision of Maine the Federal Board sidestepped its previous program. Chairman Marlett and Secretary Orton for once took a nap. Dr. Melhus, the expert Washington pathologist, who led the foreign embargo fight and proved that the disease was located in New Brunswick, and who later found plenty of it in Aorostook, was suddenly shifted to laboratory work in Washington—supposedlp at his own request Pathologist Schultz was sent from Washington to Houlton, Ft. Fairfield, Presque Isle and Caribou—purely in an adivsory capacity, Dr. Schultz will not talk on the Aroostook situation. He does not dare to report what he has actually seen. Pathologist Shapovalor of the Orono, Me., College staff, is located at Presque Isle as a reference nathority and assistant to Chief Inspector Gardner. Mr. Shapovalor is a talented Russian scientist. He has no views to express publicly. He is employed by the State. The Federal and State pathologists are ethical. They look upon the matter through scientific glasses. It was only a few days ago that Prof. Morse, the dean of Orono, would admit that treating the seed with formaldehyde or rolling it in sulphur would in a large percentage of cases prevent its recurrence.

The Danger that Maine's Chief Industry Faces.

Few men, even in Aroostook county, realize the danger facing the seed industry. This season, out of 25,000 cars moved 5,000 will be seed. A few years ago not over 2,000 cars of seed left the county. The powdery scab talk cannot but hurt Aroostook's chief and almost only industry. Sensational reports have already been scattered by the daily press all over the country. The full effect will not be felt until next Fall. Even table stock is in danger. A handsome, clean, large baked potato served on a hotel table is appetizing. If the skin is rough and scabby the guest turns away from it and recalls the scab stories. Once potatoes come under the ban, ever temporarily the consumptive demand will shrink alarmingly. The public's appetite is fickle. The arsenic newspaper story about celery cut the demand and the price of that product last year so that celery growers lost thousands. The public did not care whether celery was sprayed with arsenate of lead or with rain water. Only it did not want all the details and warnings. Just so with potatoes. One newspaper story of danger from eating scabby potatoes and the mischief is done. Such stories travel fast, newspaper readers do not reason. They are in too big a rush. They accept what they read as facts. When one realizes that the loss of five cents a bushel on the Aroostook crop means the cutting down of the county's income of $1,000,000 it is time to stop and take stock. Even a cut of five cents a bushel in the seed price means an annual loss of $125,000.

Few Arrostook potato men realize how much there is invested in the industry, directly and indirectly. The State cannot afford to jeopardize this great investment, nor can it afford to have Aroostook's annual income of over $10,000,000 endangered. Self inspection is worse than no inspection. The State and the county are simply playing with fire. Nothing short of a clearly defined program, which will prevent the planting of any seed which has not been closely and carefully inspected by competent experts, will win the confidence of Southern growers. If the State had a legal right to undertake its present inspection it has an equal power to require the planting of seed free from suspicion even. It would do better to call in Federal inspectors to enforce inspection impartially and rigidly. The investment would be a paying one. Millions permanently invested are involved.

Loose business methods and a low standard among many shippers have already caused much damage to Aroostook's reputation. There is no accepted standard. A trade body would remedy this. It would also separate the seed trade from the table stock trade. The two do not belong together. The seed specialists are strong enough now to go it alone. If they are wise they will A Parkhurst or a Reed tag has just now more value than a State inspection tag—among Southern buyers. Hoyt & Wheeler and L. S. Bean are building up records for clean seed. Probably only 10 men in that country could qual ify as reliable seed growers. Big or little every shipper will book orders for seed and herein lies much of the cause of present troubles. Seed growing is an industry to itself and should be regulated by the State rigidly. Every farmer dreams of getting into the seed deal sooner or latter and each one is sure there are "millions in it." The seed specialists know better and know how close have been their profits—when there were any. They also realize that when buyers can be educated up to paying a fair price for seed every shipper will rush into the game and will slash prices to get the business. All hands are out for the dollar in Aroostook. Only a corporal's guard stands out for a fair profit.

State inspection without State guarantee is a flat failure. D. W. Corey, the head of the American Potato Co., easily the most energetic and enterprising of the whole bunch, sees the way things are drifting. He tried to swing too much business several years ago and went down. He paid the penalty. But he is a sticker and is coming back. He sees the future of certified seed and will put his acreage under a pathologist. The largest single seed farm is the county, 478 acres, owned by Hoyt & Wheeler, put out 22,000 bbls. this season of their own seed stock. They have formaldehyded three seasons and will use a pathologist. P. H. Reed, of Ft. Fairfield, the "Cobbler King," will follow suit. L. S. Bean, formerly with E. E. Parkhurst, is another. And so on dows the list, the far seeing ones are planning a rigid program directed by a competent pathologist. It will make the seed cost more next Fall, but wise buyers will cheerfully pay the advance.

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I, James Doan, of Kingsville, in the County of Essex, Druggist, do solemnly declare that Doan's Kidney Pills were first manufactured and sold by me on the 14th day of February, A.D., 1885.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of "The Canada Evidence Act, 1893."

Declared before me at Kingsville, in the County of Essex, this 27th day of July, A.D., 1906. } James Doan.

W. A. Smith, A Commissioner, etc.

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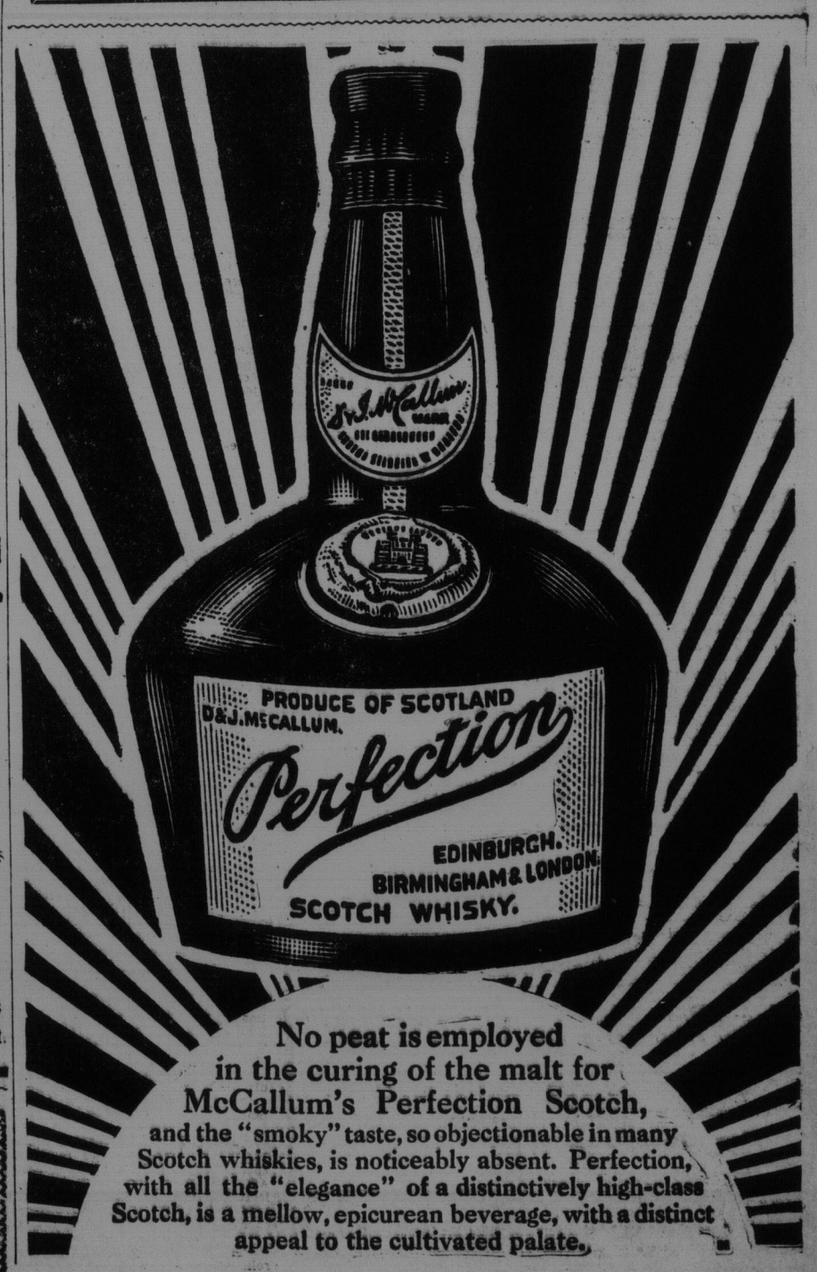

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