

Supply—Agriculture

situation. I am happy to say, however, that a recent report of the dominion bureau of statistics on farm production shows that Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia showed an increase in farm production in 1954 over 1953. However, the long-term situation is not so good.

According to figures published at the time of the last census, having special reference to agriculture, I find that in 1911 there were 14,000 farmers in Prince Edward Island. By 1921 that figure had dropped to 13,700. By 1931 it was down to 12,600 and by 1941 to 12,230. In the succeeding ten years there was a severe drop to 10,137. In other words, in that period of 40 years almost 4,000 farmers in Prince Edward Island went out of business permanently. In many cases the land they formerly occupied is not being cultivated. As a matter of fact from 1931 to 1951 we find that 120,000 acres of farm land in Prince Edward Island went out of cultivation.

Mr. Herridge: Good land?

Mr. MacLean: Yes, good land. Much of this land is lying idle and serving no useful purpose. It is growing up in tree life of various kinds, a growth which will never be of great economic significance. If it were even growing good forest it would have some economic significance for the future.

I suggest this is a serious state of affairs. I recognize that it is the trend existing at least in the whole of North America. For instance, in the early colonial days of the United States nine out of every ten persons in that country earned their livelihood from agriculture. By 1954 the ratio had changed from nine out of ten to one in six; and the actual number of people living on farms had also begun to decline about 1916. Prior to that the figures were only relative. As a matter of fact in the United States in 1916 about 32 million people lived on the farms, and by 1950 that number had dropped to 25 million. So this is a general trend.

The point I am trying to make, however, is that in my province we depend chiefly upon agriculture, and have no growing industries to compensate for the loss of population in the rural districts. The loss of population makes it more difficult for those who are left to carry on. It puts a heavier load on the remaining farms to provide community projects such as telephones, hydro, schools, churches and so on.

I am not going to suggest that I know the cure for this problem, or that there is a cure for it. It is a very serious situation which merits deep and detailed study. In the near future, because of an increasing population, we shall reach the time when all fertile land

[Mr. MacLean.]

will have to be brought back into production. It seems to me a pity that areas that have already been developed are permitted to retrogress and deteriorate. They will have to be restored at a later time.

Part of the problem is psychological. It is a lack of training. There has been a tendency for us to educate our young people away from the farms and rural life. If opportunities for education and other things are in any way equal, my firm belief is that children who are brought up in the country have a great advantage over most city children. The population generally should be made aware of the benefits of living in the country.

In this day and age of modern communication and transportation one has practically all the advantages and amenities of life in the country that one has in the city, and one has the advantage of country life besides. If it has not already been done, it might not be amiss for the department to sponsor a good film on the advantages of country life. The department should make other efforts to bring to the attention of the younger generation now growing up the advantages of living in the country. Probably the most important factor is the economic one. If agriculture is not prosperous people cannot be persuaded to remain in it, and naturally that is most important.

Another important thing in this connection is soil conservation. In many areas of our country the fertility of the soil is deteriorating, and the result is that as time goes on it becomes more difficult to make farming pay. Erosion is a hard thing for the individual to control. He can control it up to a point, but if bad agricultural practices are carried on in the surrounding area he is put at a disadvantage.

I realize there is legislation on the statute books the purpose of which is to conserve the moisture and fertility of our soil. For instance, there are the Canada Forestry Act and the Canada Water Conservation Assistance Act, and things of that sort. I believe our soil is our greatest resource. The place where soil conservation can best be studied and carried on is in the Department of Agriculture. I would suggest that serious consideration be given to legislation patterned after the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, but made wider in its scope so as to apply to all agricultural areas of our country, similar to projects that have been brought forward in many areas of the United States.

Generally speaking, this thing should be approached from the point of view of making the unit of organization the watershed of a particular stream so the whole drainage area