

SEED POTATOES

CEILING PRICE AND REGULATIONS AS TO SALE

On the orders of the day:

Mr. J. H. BLACKMORE (Lethbridge): May I ask the Minister of Finance whether he is prepared now to make the statement on seed potatoes which he hoped to make?

Mr. D. C. ABBOTT (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance): During the last few days seven questions have been asked by hon. members regarding potatoes. This is a problem that concerns the Department of Agriculture from the point of view of production and the wartime prices and trade board in so far as the questions relate to the price of potatoes. As most of the questions were about prices, it was decided that the answers should be given on behalf of the Minister of Finance, though part of the information has been obtained from officials in the Department of Agriculture.

In addition to dealing with the specific questions asked, I propose to adopt the suggestion of the leader of the opposition and make a brief statement regarding the potato situation in general.

The yield of potatoes in 1942 was unusually good, 70 million bushels being produced in Canada compared with 65 million bushels in 1941. But like many other foods, consumption has been rising. Canadian consumers have been eating more potatoes, while substantial quantities have been converted into the dehydrated product for use by the armed forces and shipment overseas. Consequently, in spite of the good crop, shortages have appeared. These have been most acute in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, which are deficiency areas and dependent for part of their supplies upon outside sources.

Another factor contributing to the shortage has been the reduction in imports of new potatoes from the United States this spring. Normally, fairly substantial quantities of United States potatoes are marketed in Canada before the Canadian crop is available. This year the United States is suffering from a more serious shortage of potatoes than Canada, with the result that prices in that country have risen above Canadian ceiling prices and only a very few cars have been imported.

In order to distribute available supplies of potatoes as equitably as possible, the wartime prices and trade board has adopted some exceptional measures. On shipments of potatoes from the maritime provinces into Quebec and Ontario, the board has, in effect, been requisitioning cars of potatoes and directing them into districts of greatest need.

In order to make prairie potatoes available in eastern Canada, the board has also been paying a freight subsidy equal to the difference between the laid down cost of the potatoes shipped from the prairie provinces and the eastern Canadian ceiling prices.

I will now deal with the specific questions asked. The hon. member for Huron North (Mr. Cardiff) asked a series of questions relating to seed potatoes. He asked:

Must potatoes sold as seed potatoes be labelled as such, and if not, what check is there to show that they are not potatoes for domestic consumption?

The answer is that certified seed potatoes must be sacked and labelled as such. The hon. member then asked:

Is there a ceiling price on potatoes sold for seed and, if so, how much?

The answer is that there is no ceiling price on certified seed potatoes. I would point out, however, that only a very small fraction of the potatoes sown in Canada—possibly less than 10 per cent—are certified seed, the balance being ordinary table stock, on which there is a ceiling price.

The final question of the hon. member for Huron North was:

Has the minister received any complaints that potatoes being used for domestic consumption are being sold as seed potatoes?

The answer to this question is that neither the Minister of Finance nor the Minister of Agriculture has received complaints that ordinary table stock potatoes are being sold as certified seed potatoes.

Mr. GRAYDON: Do I understand that neither the Minister of Finance nor the Minister of Agriculture has ever heard of these complaints?

Mr. ABBOTT: That is right. I think what my hon. friend intended to ask was whether seed potatoes were being sold for domestic consumption, but his question was whether table stock potatoes were being sold as certified seed potatoes. If he intended to ask the question I have just suggested, complaints have been received that certified seed potatoes have been sold for domestic consumption and an order of the board was passed on May 12 prohibiting such sale.

Mr. FRASER (Peterborough West): Are ordinary potatoes being sold for seed?

Mr. ABBOTT: The majority of potatoes sold in Canada are not certified seed potatoes, but the ordinary table stock potatoes.

The hon. member for Lethbridge (Mr. Blackmore) also asked two questions, one relating to the price of seed potatoes and the