

Supply—Agriculture

The hon. member also brought up the matter of beef, and said that partially cooked beef was coming in from the Argentine. May I advise him that this is fully cooked beef in sealed tins or sealed polythelene wrappers, not something else.

May I thank the committee for allowing me to speak over my time. If I have missed any questions, I am sorry and I will try to answer them during the next few minutes.

• (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. McCutcheon: Mr. Chairman, I will try not to hold up the proceedings unduly but there are a few questions I should like to ask the minister. Two concern items that originated with his predecessor, the former minister of agriculture. Item No. 1 concerns the promised \$60 per acre for not growing sugar beets—the phasing out program. This indirectly affects the minister, because shortly after parliament convened in September I asked him when the farmers could expect the \$60 payment they were promised by the previous minister on June 10, 15 days before the federal election. His reply was to the effect that payment had been held up due to lack of information as to those eligible. That was quite acceptable. About one month later I inquired again. The minister advised me that lists of those eligible had been received and that the department was working on them. I naturally assumed that payment would soon be expected. In fact this was inferred. I am a patient man. I waited another month before putting my question again. I was then told by the minister that payment could not be made until it had been authorized by parliament. In other words, the undertaking which the previous minister of agriculture had given to the farmers of southwestern Ontario was not worth the paper it was written on. I do not blame the present minister in any way, shape or form, and I will say nothing more about it if he can tell me that provision is made in these estimates to get those cheques out promptly.

Mr. Olson: We have examined this question as to whether we can legally pay these amounts without a vote title, or a supplementary estimate. The Department of Justice advises us that we need a supplementary estimate. I am prepared to submit that. I should like to tell the hon. gentleman that we now have all the data required to determine the total of the amount required and we expect it will be just short of \$1 million.

[Mr. Olson.]

I should like to correct one impression. The purpose of this is not to make a payment for not growing sugar beets; it is to assist people in getting into some other crop, during the transitional period, because a plant closed. And that was not the responsibility of the federal government.

Mr. McCutcheon: I fully accept that. If the minister had been listening carefully he would have heard me use the phrase “phasing out program”.

There is one other item to which I should like to refer, and that is the final payment in relation to the last crop grown in 1967, in other words, the final settlement. Normally this final settlement is made considerably earlier in the year. Indeed in 1965 it was made in late October, just before another federal election. Why the delay? It is my understanding that this comes under the stabilization board, and as such there is no need to wait for a supplementary estimate.

Mr. Olson: Would the hon. gentleman wish me to answer that question before he continues?

Mr. McCutcheon: I would appreciate it.

Mr. Olson: It is true that payments have been made earlier in final settlement, but not under the present formula, and further information is still needed before we are in a position to make the final payment. However we expect that it can be made reasonably soon—perhaps within two weeks, or four weeks. The hon. member can decide whether this is “soon” or not. We do not need vote title for these payments; we already have sufficient authority.

Mr. McCutcheon: Thank you. There is another item I should like to deal with. The minister himself alluded to it this afternoon. I was about to ask the hon. gentleman what happened to the Barber commission on farm machinery. This is so ancient that when it was organized it was called a commission. I noticed this afternoon the minister referred to it as a task force, in line with the new nomenclature. I submit we should by now have been given an interim report. If one had been made, perhaps it would not have been necessary for farmers to import tractors from the United Kingdom at an estimated saving of between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per unit. Surely we are entitled to know something about the causes of this obvious disparity in prices. My