

Government Owned Elevators

By R. Hicks, Kelso, Sask., in a Debate between the Kelso and Wawota Associations

Let us start from the root of the matter, and follow it up to the present time. When elevators were first being built in the west, an agreement was entered into between them and the railways, that all grain must first pass through an elevator, before being accepted as freight. Elevators by the score came into existence, and soon the inevitable combine was formed. That it was a combine is evident from the fact that at points where there were two or more elevators, the price for the day would be telegraphed by the secretary of the Grain Exchange to one of the buyers, who would hand it to the others to read and no buyers were allowed to pay more than the price stated in the telegram. The farmers became so dissatisfied with the weights, grades and dockage of the combine, that in 1897 a bill was passed by the House of Commons compelling the railways to build loading platforms, and also to give the farmers cars to ship their grain. The result of this legislation is that we (or rather a great many of us) have reverted to an antiquated method of handling grain rather than patronize and still greater strengthen that commercial octopus—the grain combine. With the loading platform has sprung up a number of commission firms, chief among which is the Grain Growers' Grain Company, a co-operative agency. This firm has done much to aid the farmer in his fight for rights, and will become more and more powerful as it commands more money. If the farmers will stand loyal to their company there is no doubt that soon the control of the grain will be in the hands of those who toil early and late to raise it. To return to the loading platform, grain cannot be stored, weighed or cleaned in or on a loading platform, and as we are a progressive people, hardships borne by our fathers need not of necessity be endured by us, hence the demand for a Provincial Farmers' Elevator System or government owned elevators, if you like.

I will now try to show the disadvantages of the present methods, and the advantages of the proposed system. I will not weary you with a recital of combine methods, you know all about them yourselves, one or two examples will suffice. One winter I drew all my grain to an elevator, always taking the same number of bags, well filled. Every load weighed the same but the last. When I had it emptied into the hopper, the weighman was not there and a man in the elevator, evidently a farmer weighed it. It weighed one bushel more than any of the previous loads. On examination we found a one bushel weight in the bottom next the poise, hidden out of sight with a twenty bushel weight next, then a ten, etc. Why put that one bushel weight in the bottom? It was not put there for the purpose of balancing the scale in anyway, for the weighman came along as we had finished, and confirmed our weight. Now, in a government elevator the grain would be weighed by a disinterested party, and the point I wish to make is that a load weighed by a disinterested party weighs one bushel more than when weighed by an employee of the combine. Another time I weighed a load of wheat on the market scale before taking it to the elevator. I was docked three bushels on that load of 40 bushels. I had previously been docked one and a-half bushels. Asking the reason for such excessive dockage, I was told in rather a heated manner by the elevator man, "You can't fool me, I saw you weigh that load." But, I think the day has gone by forever, when a man is to be punished with a double dose of dockage for presuming to weigh his own grain. The combine is bowing its arrogant head and it will be brought still lower.

We have among us now what are known as farmers' elevators. This is a semi-co-operative, semi-corporation concern, usually built by the more prosperous members of a community, who hope to make dividends out of those too poor to take shares. Now, with government elevators every farmer would be made a shareholder simply by act of the legis-

lature, and would have his grain handled at cost. Among many other benefits of a public system would be the following: We could store our grain, realize on it say 75 per cent. of value and sell it when we liked, thus cutting out the speculator. As a lot of the grain would be stored until spring or summer, a glut in the market would be avoided. This means that the general price of grain would be steadier. There would doubtless be a very large quantity of grain for the year paying storage, which would bring in a large revenue, thus diminishing the original cost. At present there is only a small percentage of the prairie under cultivation, but in a very few years, judging the future in the light of the past, a much larger area will be cultivated. Then with one elevator man, where there are now from two to six or more, there would be such an enormous quantity of grain for each point, that it could most probably be run through an elevator for a half or even a quarter cent. per bushel, for it must be remembered the system will be run at cost. With public elevators would come a sample market at Winnipeg, where grain would sell according to its intrinsic value, so the loss we now suffer from the spread in grades would be eliminated. All grain shipped from these new farmers' elevators would of course, be weighed and cleaned thus insuring the shipper from loss in transit and putting his grain on this sample market in a cleaned state where it would command a higher price on this account. The screenings (no inconsiderable item) would be retained on the farm and "freight on dirt" would be a thing of the past. One of the ex-

price for something that is not a going concern. The Saskatchewan Government borrowed the money to finance the telephone proposition at 3 3-8 per cent. interest. Now, if elevators can be bought at 30 per cent. on the dollar and money borrowed for this at 3 3-8 per cent., why not have them?

Last year about this time, when the petitions of ownership of elevators were being circulated, one man to whom I went refused to sign it. I was in conversation with that same man a few days ago and told him about this debate. He said he was afraid we were making a mistake, as some of the clever speakers of Wawota might give it a set-back. I mention this to illustrate the change in public opinion.

The Manitoba Government are pledged to government ownership of initial elevators. At the last convention S.G.G.A. a resolution in favor of government ownership of elevators was carried unanimously.

Government ownership of elevators is an honest attempt to settle the warfare that has been going on for years between the combine and the farmers. It is the only solution ever brought forward that is worth considering. Had the government built these elevators in the first place, the whole difficulty arising from this vexed question would have been avoided.

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The Noxious Weeds Question

By Francis J. Clark, Edmonton

The subject of noxious weeds is one which affects the farmer in many ways, not only in reducing his crop of grain, but also causing him extra expense in threshing and often in carriage. In the present Weed Ordinance, Clause 2 is unfair to nearly every occupier of land in the province, for it is impossible that any moderate area of land is free from noxious weeds (many of which have established themselves as natives) so that one and all are at the mercy of the Weed Inspector. At the same time, there are cases where the occupier is so indifferent

It seems to me however that some method could be meted out to these. I should make it compulsory for any owner or occupier who finds these growing on his land to advise the department and from year to year continue to do so until they are stamped out.

There is little doubt a proper summer fallow will kill most of the noxious weeds as above tabulated, but it has to be done very thoroughly and the average farmer is not able to do it or think he is not able. Cultivating the land till June and then sowing with Beardless Barley will have a good effect, as even Ball Mustard will not mature sufficiently to shed badly while this quick maturing barley ripens, but while these are effective remedies for clearing the land if properly carried out the difficulty is to get everyone to do so and for this reason the Weed Inspector is necessary.

Under the present system, the Weed Inspectors during the growing season go from farm to farm inspecting the crops and notifying the department of the result, but it is impossible that a casual visit can in any way enable an inspector to judge of the noxious weeds on the hundreds of acres visited, and it is still further impossible for him to condemn one farm for Ball Mustard when every farm in the district has it, consequently, so far as I can ascertain, after living here some 15 years, the noxious weeds have rather increased than decreased and it is not always the farmers fault either, for though as I have shown in gathering the crop a lot of these noxious weed seeds are shed, yet I fully believe the bulk of this evil is caused in other ways. There is a law affecting threshing machines which compel them to be cleaned before they leave one farm for another, another compels them to clean the grain allowing a very small percentage of weed seeds to the bushel. It is impossible for the farmer himself to enforce these regulations though much to his advantage to do so. Only two years ago, I knew of a threshing outfit that travelled some twelve miles through two cities to a farm near mine, the occupant and his man then helped to clean the machine and they told me they got a pile of one or two bushels of wild oats, etc., out of it. Then again the piles of seeds left under the machine are dragged over when the machine is moved and the heap itself is difficult to dispose of, particularly as at that time the farmer is busy helping them to move to another farm. Anyhow, I have tried all I know how to burn these seeds where they lie, but to no effect, and this year out of despair I had dug a deep hole at each setting and buried them some feet deep. The animals and birds carry the seeds all over the land and in a hundred ways they help to spread the nuisance.

There are threshing machines which grade and bag everything from the best grain for market to the weed seeds and there are attachments to the ordinary threshing machine made which will do the same. Surely if the law was made that all threshing machines should grade, say, grain and weeds, (I would prefer pure grain, inferior grain and weeds) and bag same, it would do more towards helping forward the destruction of noxious weeds in one year than all the weed inspectors in a dozen years roaming through the crop in June or July.

At the present time, if the threshing machines try and clean the grain they blow out so much light and inferior grain that would make feed, that it does not pay, besides leaving more noxious weed seeds to be distributed. If it was graded and bagged, the law could demand the weeds and inferior grain to be chopped or otherwise rendered unproductive.

It seems to me that if the weed inspectors were made to follow every threshing machine and see they fulfilled the law, and the law compelled them besides cleaning the machine to bag all weed seeds we should go a long way towards remedying the evil. The weed inspector by examination could tell the different varieties of weeds and be able to judge the quantity far better than he could by seeing them growing in the summer, he would also be in a position to recommend or enforce some cultivation on badly affected areas without inflicting the loss on the farmer that the condemnation of a grain crop would entail, and further by comparison from year to year he would be able to tell whether the farmer's methods of eradication were effective or not.



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cuses given by the railways for the high rates on grain, is that so much of it is loaded at platforms and cars kept standing for days. Now, under the system we are advocating, these cars could be loaded at an elevator in a few minutes. Then again, a large quantity of the grain would be stored, which would further diminish the number of cars needed. We would then be in a position to demand a reduction of rates, which might easily equal elevator charges. Platform grain would of course pay present rates, this in itself would put the platform out of business and divert all grain to the elevators.

Now for the cost of the system. I am told that the premier of Manitoba has said that there are lots of elevators in Manitoba to be bought for fifty cents on the dollar, owing to their business being taken from them by the loading platform. Last December, there were eleven cars of grain loaded at Doonside, my nearest siding in a few days, all by the way, consigned to Grain Growers' Grain Company, not one bushel of which went through the elevator at that point, nor was there any grain taken into the elevator during the time those cars were being loaded. Consequently, it is not necessary that we pay a going concern

to the growth and spread of noxious weeds that it is well to give the inspector some power to cope with such. In this part of the province, the most prevalent weeds in the fields that cause damage are Ball Mustard, Wild Oats, Wild Buckwheat and Pig Weed, (the last two as native plants do not come under the term noxious weeds) and in the gardens in addition to the above come Sheppard's Purse. All these are annuals, though all but the wild oats will germinate sometimes in the fall and live through the winter, and they all have the unfortunate habit of forming seeds which drop while the plant is still in flower and also of being able to mature their seeds (if at all developed) even after they are cut down and shed same, and worse still of being able to retain their germinating properties if buried under ground for years. The only other plants which I have found at all troublesome and injurious are the two grasses—Sweet Grass and Foxtail. I think it is therefore with these weeds and grasses with which we have to deal.

In some parts, the wild mustard or pod mustard, and also Stink Weed, Hares Ear Mustard, and the Canadian Thistle have tried to establish themselves, but I cannot find but that they are being kept under wherever they have occurred.