

Agricultural Prices Support Act

Right Hon. James Gardiner, Minister of Agriculture, and J. G. Taggart, head of the agricultural prices support board. Mr. Duffie reviewed the provisions of the Agricultural Prices Support Act of 1944.

Mr. Duffie quoted Mr. Gardiner as saying that he was promised a year ago that the potato growers would attempt co-operation under such a system and that he still based future aid to the growers on this assumption.

As explained by Mr. Duffie, the co-operative would enter into contracts with individual growers at planting time to purchase their potatoes at a set price. The co-operative would also enter into a contract with the federal government providing for what amounts to a floor price for the potatoes sold by the members to the co-operative. The co-operative would also set up a selling agency, which could be an existing organization, a new organization or a provincial marketing board.

The grower would know at planting time what the minimum price would be for his crop and could get advances on his crop. The government would determine the minimum price, in consultation with the co-operative organization, and the minimum would not exceed 80 per cent of the previous three years' sale price.

The government would pay to the co-operative any loss due to poor markets and would also pay the actual processing, carrying and selling costs, up to a maximum set in advance.

What is suggested in this quotation sounds like something that has never been done before. I would like to know from the minister whether he told Mr. Duffie when he was here in conference with him that a co-operative would be set up which would tell the farmers what they would receive for their potatoes, or any other commodities, before they were planted.

Mr. Gardiner: That is not what Mr. Duffie said. He is simply quoting the co-operative act of 1939, which is not this act at all. Everything the hon. member has read is in the act of 1939.

Mr. Hatfield: The act of 1939?

Mr. Gardiner: Yes.

Mr. Hatfield: The co-operative is being set up under that act, is it?

Mr. Gardiner: Co-operatives have been set up across Canada under that act. Furs in Prince Edward Island and in other provinces are sold under that act.

Mr. Hatfield: I have never known of a co-operative under the government's program telling the farmer what he would receive for his products before they were produced. I have never known of any action such as that being carried out except in regard to wheat.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. member was here when it was passed.

Mr. Hatfield: That would be a very good act for the farmers. They would be glad to have an act like that. If you promised them a certain price before they plant their potatoes they would be pleased. That is what Mr. Duffie explained to the potato growers at

Grand Falls. He made the explanation after a conference with the minister. However, the potato support which was given in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island last year was not carried out that way. We did not receive the benefit of the support program until away on in March or April, and the needy farmers, and the veterans who had returned from the war and who took up farming under the Veterans' Land Act, had to sell their potatoes before the support program went into effect, and they sold them below the cost of production.

As I said before, the regulations do not work in the way they were intended and the board that has been set up has not done anything since it was set up, as far as I know. We have always had to come here and appeal. Every organization has had to appeal to the minister, or to the department, to carry out the provisions of the support act; whereas in the house it was said that the board would study everything, and as soon as any farm product got down to near the cost of production the board would act. That is the kind of support act I thought we were getting in 1944.

Mr. M. J. Coldwell (Rosetown-Biggar): I should like to say a word or two, particularly because of the interchange that took place a few moments ago. I remember the passing of the co-operative act of 1939. Speaking from memory, I believe that under that act the government could guarantee up to 90 per cent of the average price of the previous three years.

Mr. Gardiner: Up to 80 per cent, as Mr. Duffie said.

Mr. Coldwell: I thought it was 90 per cent. The joker about that is that it has never been guaranteed up to that amount. The guarantee has been up to 50 per cent, perhaps, but not to the extent that the act would make it attractive to the co-operatives to ask for such a guarantee.

We have had a very interesting discussion today. I think the resolutions do show an advance on the part of the government in regard to its marketing legislation. I am very glad indeed to see the one-year limit removed from the Agricultural Prices Support Act, and left so that it is somewhat indefinite. I regard that as an advance in this legislation, and I welcome it. I welcome it, may I say, because I believe that sooner or later—and, I think, the sooner the better—we shall have to do what has been suggested both by the hon. member who has just taken his seat and on numerous occasions by colleagues of mine in this group, including today the hon. member for Melfort (Mr. Wright) and the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Bryce).