

### *Supply*

For the most part, the industry has competed head to head with the world with little extraordinary assistance from the Canadian taxpayer.

P.E.I., Canada's smallest province, competed against a nation, the Netherlands, in seed quality, and won.

The victory was not won overnight. It took years and the efforts of generation of farmers to achieve this position. It took support from Agriculture Canada over many years in developing new seed varieties, identifying new markets, inspection and protection services. It took many years of support from the provincial government which augmented and facilitated the efforts of the farm community and Agriculture Canada.

This combination of ideal soil and environmental conditions, with industrious, progressive farmers, who are committed to quality, disease-free stocks, in co-ordination with governments, has enabled the potato industry in Prince Edward Island to withstand the ups and downs of a very volatile industry. There were many poor years, and fewer good ones, but enough to sustain the industry over the long term.

But this scenario has been brought to an abrupt halt with the discovery of the potato virus Y-N strain in our potato crop. There is zero tolerance for this virus in North America. This discovery has closed the door to the exports of our potatoes to our largest markets, the United States and the rest of Canada.

Europe, which has had the disease for over 50 years, has established a tolerance level for the virus which has enabled the European community to live with the virus which they had to do because its elimination and eradication was impossible.

I must remind the House that the potato virus Y does not affect human beings in any way, shape or form.

• (1640)

All potatoes have the PVY virus of one strain or another. The problem with the potato virus Y-N strain is that it is deadly to tobacco. It destroys tobacco.

The transmission to the Americans of the information that P.E.I. had PVY-N resulted in the immediate closure of the American border to P.E.I. seed. The embargo was soon extended to include table stock unless sprayed with a sprout inhibitor. Canada, after protesting to Washing-

ton about how unfair this was, followed the American example and closed Canada's borders.

These actions, of course, brought the potato industry in Prince Edward Island into chaos.

The lack of time prohibits me from going into a step-by-step unfolding of the drama to this point in time. It is sufficient to say that an eradication compensation program was put into effect for the 1990 crop in an effort to contain and eliminate the disease. A massive leaf testing offensive was put in place for the 1991 crop. Millions of leaves were tested in P.E.I., but considerably less testing was done in other provinces.

Ninety-six new cases of PVY-N were discovered in Prince Edward Island, ten in Ontario and a few in the other provinces.

PVY-N was said to be found in varieties which were PVY-N-free last year. The eradication program for the 1990 crop seemed to have been a failure, that is until the validity of Agriculture Canada's testing methodology was brought into question.

Independent scientists have brought into question Agriculture Canada's methods and results which, if proven correct, means that there has been a misdiagnosis of the virus.

Agriculture Canada's 96 positive cases may not be PVY-N at all, but rather a fusion of other PVY strains which can produce the same result when swabbed on tobacco leaves.

As one commentator said, the Island was ploughed down for nothing and its main industry destroyed. This whole sad tale has produced a whole series of questions which have not and may never be answered.

(1) If PVY-N was rampant on Prince Edward Island, why has there been no infection of the P.E.I. tobacco crop, no infection whatsoever? Our tobacco producers have absolutely no fear of infection saying that if there are PVY-N infected potatoes, a regular spray program will take care of the aphids.

(2) Where did the PVY-N virus come from in the first place? How was it introduced to Prince Edward Island? One thing is sure, this government with its centralization program and taking scientists and virologists from the provinces to Ottawa only means that it will be easier to have diseased stock coming into this country in the future.