

the highest quality seed potatoes in the world. After all, Island growers are the victims of the virus and not the perpetrators.

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In view of the eradication plan already agreed upon, it is estimated that losses, whether through the destruction of crops or through drastically reduced prices for both seed and table potatoes, will be in the \$25 million to \$30 million range. This amount would be the minimum required just to keep the industry afloat.

We must consider the situation in the context of declining farm incomes. Agriculture Canada's estimate is that total farm income has declined by 30 per cent from 1990 to 1991. When we factor in the unexpected potato losses, we can see why the economic plight of potato farmers is so terrible, and we can see why the industry is in such turmoil.

At this point, when a compensation package is being negotiated, there is little point in trying to assign blame. We have to understand the position of those who are directly involved and who find their livelihoods in jeopardy. The question that is being asked by potato producers on Prince Edward Island is: where did the virus originate? No one seems to be able to tell the potato producers where the virus came from and how it arrived on Prince Edward Island.

One of the reasons why the seed potato industry has been such a success on Prince Edward Island is the very fact that we are an Island and it is easier to control disease when separated from the major land mass of the country. On top of that, the stringent inspection and growing standards that we have for seed potatoes, which were forced upon us especially by the European Economic Council, have resulted in the high quality of seed potatoes and the fact that we can export seed potatoes all over the world, to all provinces in Canada and to 22 states in the United States.

Where the virus originated is still a major mystery. Another question people are asking is: When did the officials become aware of its presence and, why did it take so long to react? There is a rumour this disease was discovered last June. Of course, the first question producers are asking is if it was discovered last June, why were the crops not immediately ploughed down in order

Supply

to control the disease? Why then, as one farm group has asked, was the panic button pushed?

I think Agriculture Canada is well aware that PVY-N virus has been around for many years. Apparently it is all through the United States. It is widely spread in Europe, and there are instances of it being in the province of Ontario as long as 15 years ago. Why all of a sudden has the PVY-N virus become such a major issue? The thinking follows that the State of Maine, which has been harassing our potato exporters for many years on the border crossings and so on, has discovered an opportunity whereby it can take advantage of the P.E.I. markets if the P.E.I. products are eliminated.

It has used this as a political tactic. I think Senator George Mitchell is not shy about saying that he will fight for his people. The question we are asking is who is fighting for our people, especially when our department went to the United States and argued that its ban was unfair. Then in a matter of days it came back to Canada and, without consultation with the provincial government and the producers of Prince Edward Island, instituted the same ban.

The other question producers are asking is why were the producers informed so late in the game? If the producers had been informed earlier on, drastic measures could have been implemented much earlier.

In time, these concerns must be addressed. Hopefully, when that time comes, all our growers will still be in business and none will have to, as one grower put it, drop her keys on the banker's desk. This is one of the many grave problems facing farmers in every region of the country. Our farmers have done everything humanly possible to make our operations effective and viable. We are not competing on a level playing field. Other countries are taking steps to assure their food security. We have to do the same.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member from Prince Edward Island that I enjoyed listening to his comments about Prince Edward Island potatoes. I certainly have a great love for your province. Prince Edward Island is a part of Canada that I, from Saskatchewan, enjoy visiting probably more than any other area of the country other than my own. I envy you the Island, to a certain extent.