

think we serve anyone by putting forth either sensational points of view or views that are simply not accurate.

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● (1440)

AGRICULTURE

WASHING OF VEHICLES LEAVING NEWFOUNDLAND IN ORDER TO COMBAT POTATO DISEASE

Mr. Mel Gass (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. At this time the Department of Agriculture is washing every vehicle that leaves Newfoundland in order to stop the spread of potato warts and golden nematodes to the mainland. These diseases could wipe out the potato industry in P.E.I. and the rest of Canada as well. In order to save money the Department is thinking about the option of discontinuing the washing of vehicles leaving Newfoundland. Will the Minister advise the House and the Canadian potato industry what is being done to ensure the continuance of this very essential program?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's interest in the subject and I appreciate the Hon. Member and his colleagues from P.E.I. and Newfoundland bringing this matter to my attention. I would like to allay their fears by indicating that indeed, as far as the Department is concerned, no final decision has been taken but I have instructed the Department to put a full and complete hold on that operation. Indeed, it should continue to function in the future as it has in the past. I will also be holding a meeting either Thursday or Friday morning with my colleagues from those two provinces. We will sit down together to map out, in co-operation and in concert, a future course of action on that problem.

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AGRICULTURE

ASSISTANCE FOR GRAIN FARMERS

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Agriculture. For some time now and particularly in the last couple of weeks, the Government has clearly indicated that special assistance will be provided to grain farmers in the 1987-88 crop year. Taking the Government at its word, can the Minister confirm that he will not be announcing any details whatsoever about the 1987-88 special assistance program before spring planting, and possibly not even before harvest?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question as well. Indeed, the Hon. Member, the House and the industry will, I am sure, take some satisfaction in the fact that my colleague, the Minister in charge of the

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Canadian Wheat Board, and I met some 55 farm leaders last Thursday. They joined with us in a joint press release which sent a very sensible signal to the industry that indeed Canadian grain and oil-seeds farmers should not plan their 1987 cropping pattern based on the formula of distribution of the Special Canadian Grains Program, nor should they base their 1987 cropping pattern on the expectation of continuing government assistance.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

ANNOUNCEMENT OF INITIAL PAYMENTS

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister has just indicated, he is aware of the great difficulty farmers are having in deciding what to plant in the spring. Since the Minister will not confirm a special assistance program, can he tell us if he will be announcing the 1987-88 initial payment details this month or will he simply be announcing the initial payment level for the top grades? Will he be announcing any details at all about initial payments?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, after much discussion and consultation with farmers and farm groups, it is the opinion of the Government that we should go ahead and announce initial payments at the normal time which traditionally has been in the middle of April.

The Hon. Member will also know, being a farmer, that initial payment announcements are not necessarily accompanied by the spreads. They are announced at some time later. I think last year the spreads were not announced until some time toward the beginning of June. We will probably be looking at announcing the spreads at a later date than we have in the past, but we intend to announce initial payments at the normal time which would be some time in the middle of April.

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FINANCE

COLLECTION OF GASOLINE TAXES

Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Finance I will direct my question to the Minister of State for Finance. In the February Budget, the Government, by changing the method of collecting gasoline taxes, effectively increased the operating costs of independent service stations. This has had the effect of reducing competition in the market-place. I met with members of the association involved and they asked me to ask the Minister the following question. Why has the Government decided to hit small Canadian-owned independent gasoline marketers while at the same time helping large multinational