

Foot-and-mouth disease

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. member for Melfort.

Mr. Ross (Souris): He referred to both the hon. member for Melfort and the hon. member for Lake Centre. The hon. member for Lake Centre expressed exactly the same doubts I hold when he asked how the department was going to prove, by means of the laboratory test being conducted in Hull, whether this immigrant from Germany had picked up the virus where he worked on this Saskatchewan farm or had brought it to this country with him. I hold exactly the same doubts. I have read in the newspapers that the immigrant in question has made statements to the R.C.M.P. to the effect that he is feeling very bad about the situation, and that immediately prior to his departure from Europe he had worked on a farm where the entire herd had the dreaded foot-and-mouth disease. That is the statement he has made.

The point that bothers me is how the department expects to be able to clear up by the laboratory test whether he actually brought the virus to Canada or picked it up in the Regina area. I do not believe the minister can make that clear to me. Is that possible? I have that doubt, and I think you cannot prove anything by all the investigation now being carried on in the laboratory in Hull. When the Minister of Agriculture made his statement on Friday he said we had been extremely fortunate and lucky in Canada that we had not had any such dreaded disease heretofore. Having followed his statements and the debate in the house today, I certainly agree with him that we have been extremely fortunate and lucky. In fact from what evidence we have so far I am rather doubtful as to what protection our livestock breeders have against such a disease being brought into this country from Mexico, Europe or other places. According to the information we have received we have very little protection against this virus or disease being brought into the country.

I represent a constituency adjoining Saskatchewan. It is one where many livestock are raised, both commercial and purebred herds. The people who are producing purebred cattle have made great strides over the past years, especially in the western part of Canada. They have built up a very worthwhile industry. I do not know of anything that has hit an important industry with such an effect as the announcement of this dreaded disease at this time. It affects the entire cattle industry of Canada, and I think it will have repercussions on our whole economy far beyond what many of us realize at this time. I listened closely to the minister's radio address this morning and his appeal to the people of the nation. I must confess that, while I agreed

[Mr. Ross (Souris).]

with much of what he said about extending the hog marketing policy a bit, I was very disappointed in another respect because I think the most important factor today is to encourage the cattle industry and prevent the operators from becoming panicky. It is true that the bill does certain things for those people who are having their herds slaughtered. We are all concerned about their being properly compensated, but the all-important factor is that the government of the day should do something to lend encouragement and stability to this great industry at the present time.

In the part of the country where I live we have no evidence of this disease and I hope we do not have, but I know that my neighbours are panicky and many of them would like to get out of the cattle business right now. I feel that would be bad for them and bad for the country. Therefore I hope the government will see its way clear before too much time elapses to take action under the Agricultural Prices Support Act, or some such measure, to institute floor prices.

During the period from November 26 until this dreaded disease was announced, it is a coincidence that for one reason or another the livestock markets of this country were battered down by \$50 or \$60 a head on the average. Since the announcement of this disease the market has dropped another \$50 or \$60 a head on the average animal, or by something like 5 cents a pound live weight. You can understand what this means to those who have built up this industry and who have a heavy investment in it. Therefore I think it most important that quite apart from the measure now before us the government immediately assure the producers of this country of a floor price, in order to encourage this great industry. As I say, nothing has ever come as such a shock to this country. The cattle industry is very important in Canada, and if it is affected that in turn will have an effect on our entire economy.

With regard to the board, I cannot quite picture how they are going to arrive at a settlement under this proposed bill. I listened to the minister this morning on the radio announce the members of the board, all outstanding men in this country; but I was surprised that its membership did not include a man associated with the industry of livestock breeding. It is true that one of the members has been in charge of community pastures under P.F.R.A., and he is a fine individual. Certainly Mr. Robertson, secretary of the Saskatchewan wheat pool, is also an outstanding man, and there is a representative of the treasury department. In fairness to the livestock breeders, however, I should have thought they would be represented on