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features editor

If you've ever lived, worked, or eaten in New Brunswick, you've noticed the presence of McCain's - the largest producers of french fries and frozen food in the commonwealth. McCain Foods Ltd., with its operations based in Florenceville in the Upper Saint John River Valley, has grown into a powerful multinational corporation since it commenced production in 1957.

In addition to the Florenceville operation, McCain's has plants in Grand Falls N.B.; Scarborough, England; Australia; and two locations in Holland. The McCains, however, are also in fields other than food processing; their affiliates include Thomas Equipment Ltd. of Florenceville, manufacturers of farm machinery; and McCain Fertilizers Ltd, which operates fertilizer blending plants at Florenceville and Grand Falls.

The extent of McCain control has lead some, notably the National Farmers Union, to charge the McCain operations with holding a feudal relationship with farmers in the area, or at least of engaging in coercive activities and unfair business practices.

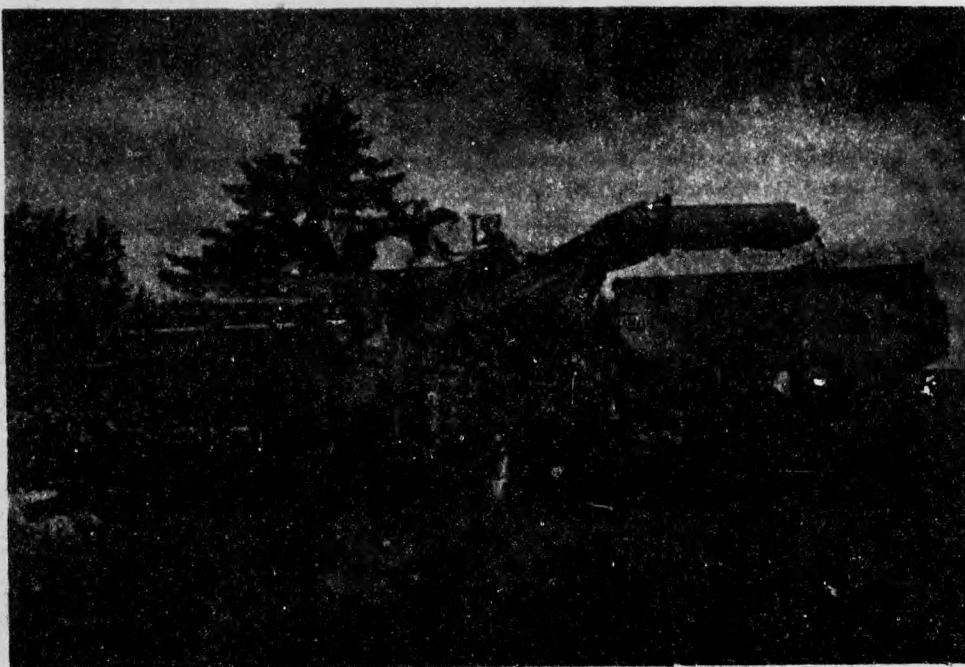
Wallace McCain, the president of McCain Foods, vehemently denies all such accusations. He told us his company has never exerted any pressure on farmers to buy equipment or fertilizer from McCain affiliates, and added that many of the farmers who deal with McCain's use other brands.

During our interview with McCain, he made frequent references to "that son of a bitch Stewart" - Toronto Star staff writer Walter Stewart - who wrote an article last fall which McCain said made his company "look just terrible." At any rate, he thought the article was very inaccurate and added that Stewart had not used any of the information he had obtained from a lengthy interview with him.

Stewart dealt primarily with the way the McCain operations had been heavily subsidized by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, and suggested that this might be a result of the close ties between the McCain family and the Liberal party. (Wallace and his brother, Harrison, the Chairman of McCain Foods, both worked for Pierre Trudeau during his 1968 campaign for the Liberal leadership. Andrew McCain and Robert McCain, the younger brothers, are both active with the party; Andrew is treasurer of the New Brunswick Liberal Association and Robert ran unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in the last provincial election.)

Wallace McCain admitted that his family was involved with politics

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but said that such involvement was the duty of all citizens. He pointed out that former Conservative Member of Parliament and New Brunswick Premier Hugh John Flemming had defended the McCain interests in the House of Commons and, when he was premier, had guaranteed a bond issue for McCain's (the provincial government would be responsible for the company's debts.)

When a DREE official left the department to take up a job with McCain's, some pointed at this as another example of patronage. Jack Brooks, who works for the National Farmers Union in Perth-Andover, told us the DREE expatriate's sole task with McCain's was searching out more grants. McCain, on the other hand, said that the former DREE official was managing the two McCain's plants in Holland (McCain Europa), and had nothing to do with looking for DREE grants.

Wallace McCain took several swipes at the New Democratic Party. "Most all of that stuff can be traced back to the NDP," he said, referring to the unfavorable comments which have been made about the McCain operations. He said that the series of articles done by Stewart last fall, prior to the federal election, concerning DREE had been very inaccurate, and added "I don't know whether he (Stewart) was being paid by the NDP or what."

McCain lamented the fact that today "if you're in agriculture, you have to be a

cooperative. . .that's not my style, it's their's."

"Agribusiness is out," he added. (Agribusiness is the controlling of farmland by large corporations, rather than small farmers, a tendency which is definitely on the increase. McCain apparently was referring to the NDP once more when he said agribusiness was "out".)

The McCain interests themselves hold a considerable amount of farmland. According to New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources, the McCain holdings include 101 acres in Madawaska County, 797 acres in Victoria county, and 9,133 in Carleton County, the site of the head office. The latter includes the land owned by McCain Foods, its subsidiary Valley Farms, its affiliate McCain Produce, the A.D. McCain Estate, and Mrs. Laura McCain, the mother of the four McCain brothers.

According to a report compiled by the National Farmers Union in 1970, an area which in 1921 had 190 farms with 125 farmers was reduced to 10 farmers, with the rest of the land being owned by McCain's.

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