

Supply—Agriculture

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Harkness: The hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort spoke particularly about rapeseed. The fact that the freight rate on rapeseed is as high as it is and thus precludes its use as widely as might otherwise be the case has been a matter of concern to me, the Minister of Trade and Commerce and the Minister of Transport. We have been taking what steps we can to try to secure a cheaper freight rate for rapeseed. I believe there was a small reduction in the rate not very long ago and we are still attempting to get an agreed charge which will put rapeseed in a more favourable position.

The hon. member for Beauce spoke about the increase in the number of loans made by the farm loan board since the present government came into power. Of course there has been an increase and a considerable one in the number of loans made. The hon. member took this as indicating that the farm situation was worse. Actually it is an indication that it is better. If hon. members will look at the record of loans made they will find that they always increase when times are good and decrease when times are bad. However, the main reason for the increase in the number of loans made by the board and in the amounts of such loans lies in the fact that we greatly improved the situation with respect to the amount that a man could borrow and the difficulty he had in getting a loan. We reduced those difficulties considerably and the result of the liberalization of the lending policy which we put into effect is that a considerable increase in the number of loans made has taken place.

The hon. member for Beauce and one or two others said something about imports of chickens from the United States and attempted to make out that this had caused a great decrease in the price of chickens in Canada and was largely responsible for the quite serious decline in the price of poultry during the past six to eight months particularly. Actually the reason for the fall in the price of poultry in Canada has been the extraordinarily rapid increase in the amount of poultry produced in this country. I have here a small table showing the production of chickens under four pounds, chickens over four pounds and fowl and turkeys in the years 1956, 1957 and 1958. As far as chickens under four pounds are concerned there were 103 million pounds produced in 1956 and 175 million pounds produced in 1958. With respect to chickens over four pounds there were 29,200,000 pounds produced in 1956 and 28,200,000 in 1958, or not much change. There were 49 million pounds of fowl produced in 1958 compared with 51 million pounds in 1956.

[The Chairman.]

Production of turkeys amounted to 60 million pounds in 1956 and 86 million pounds in 1958, quite a marked increase. As a matter of fact, the over-all increase in production from 1957 to 1958 was 67 million pounds, from 279 million to 346 million.

Imports actually have declined very considerably since 1956. In 1956, 22 million pounds of poultry of all kinds were imported into the country; 12,270,000 pounds in 1957; and 12,045,000 pounds in 1958. From these figures I think it is quite evident that the decrease in the price of poultry has been due not to imports from the United States, which in amount were very small compared with total Canadian production last year—12 million pounds compared with 346 million pounds—but to the very rapid increase in the production of poultry in this country.

I might say that ever since I have been Minister of Agriculture I have been warning the poultry producers that if they continue to increase their production at the rate they have been in the past two to three years they will produce themselves into a condition of bankruptcy. Unfortunately that is what has happened to some of them during the past few months. They are producing far more poultry than the country possibly can consume because, as I think people realize, the market for poultry is strictly limited. The hon. member for Timiskaming said that most of the people he sees coming out of supermarkets are taking out poultry and not red meat but actually the situation is that while we consumed 358 million pounds of poultry all told in 1958—I think that is the figure but it is given from memory and it may be wrong—we consumed over a billion pounds of beef alone and a larger quantity of pork—I would have to check the figure—to say nothing of lamb and so on.

In other words, there is only a certain market for poultry. People will not eat poultry every day. In fact, on the basis of experience they will not eat nearly as much of it as they will beef even though beef is three times the price at the present time.

Several members, including the hon. member for Charlevoix and the hon. member for Bellechasse, brought up the matter of maple sugar. I think the member for Beauce also referred to maple sugar. We have been quite prepared to put a support price under maple sugar if the producers want it. There are two main companies, really co-operative organizations, that deal in maple products in the province of Quebec. Their officials came to see us and after a full discussion concerning a support price for maple sugar and maple syrup they came to the conclusion that they would be much better off to take advantage of the provisions of the Agricultural