

Supply—Agriculture

I have in my hand one letter a copy of which I understand was sent to the previous speaker and I am surprised he did not mention it in his remarks. May I read part of the letter I just received on this matter addressed to myself under date of May 5 and referring to the remarks the minister made last week:

I am more than surprised at the remarks of Mr. Harkness. Except for one, these statements are untrue, or only half-truths. The wages paid on B.C. farms are probably higher than those paid in Ontario, but our wages are certainly not too high. They are from \$350 per month for skilled farm workmen, and range down to \$1 and 75 cents per hour for common labour, and boys and girls from school for harvesting. Piecework rates for harvesting average about double these rates per hour. California farm wages are higher, but Mr. Harkness failed to mention that in California the tomato yield per acre averages more than double B.C. and Ontario because the harvesting season there is more than double in length. He also failed to mention the new strains of tomatoes particularly adapted to California climate were developed largely by federal money.

I believe the previous speaker said that it was not federal money but state money. My information is that it was all federal money.

He did not mention that these same California tomatoes had displaced thousands of acres of tomatoes in central U.S.A. Our farms and canneries of B.C. are more efficient on the average than are those of Ontario and Quebec; otherwise we could not be in business this long with subsidized freight rates favouring canned goods from the east.

Then he refers me to a producer who is also a canner and has this to say:

His company operated a tomato farm of 150 acres in the Kamloops area. They had a brand new tomato factory valued at nearly \$200,000. The whole operation ceased three years ago because of California competition on the coast markets.

I want to emphasize that that is information about an Okanagan canner and producer. He goes on to say:

Our land is not worn out and our yields and quality are better than that of Ontario on the average. We have figures from Ontario agriculturists that show Ontario tomato farms as being smaller than those in B.C. From personal observation I say without fear of successful contradiction that B.C. farms are more mechanized.

They are more mechanized than others in Canada producing the same crop. As I say, this information comes to me as a result of having sent this gentleman a copy of *Hansard* containing what the minister had to say and asking for this gentleman's comment. That is the reply I received. A few days later I received another letter and in all fairness to the minister I think I should place on the record a part of the letter I received on May 9. It reads in part as follows:

Generally I would say most people think the government missed a pat on the back from grower and labour alike because, as in 1958 and 1959, help for the tomato grower came too late to be

more than partially effective. It was not possible in the middle of April to get sufficient acreage planted to enable any of the closed canneries to reopen. We will not be operating our cannery to full capacity unless there is better than a normal crop yield.

If nothing of a permanent nature is done for the tomato industry before next March, the Minister of Agriculture could be right when he inferred the money spent to help this industry in 1958, 1959 and 1960 is wasted. His warning that no help will be forthcoming in 1961 does sound strange.

As a city man but one who is very interested in British Columbia and its problems, and having sent what the minister had to say about this matter to this gentleman, I thought it was only right that I should now convey to the minister the answers I have received in reply to his statement a few days ago and ask him to comment thereon. I would also suggest that possibly there should be a change of mind and that interest in this problem of the Okanagan should be continued in the form of continued assistance but with that assistance being given at a far earlier date than in the past.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, I would suspect that the information the hon. member has just put on the record has come from Mr. Bulman of Bulmans canneries in the Okanagan.

Mr. Winch: And the trade unions.

Mr. Harkness: I do not want to carry on a controversy with Mr. Bulman and the trade unions in the Okanagan valley over the tomato situation. However, the figures quoted do indicate the fact that the labour cost there for the handling of tomatoes or for farm labour is considerably higher than in Ontario and higher than for highly qualified farm workers on the prairies who have to handle large combines worth \$8,000 to \$10,000. What I said last Friday was that there was a very high content of hand labour with respect to some of the tomato production in the Okanagan valley.

However, the general situation, whatever reasons may be given for it, is that the yield of tomatoes in the Okanagan during the period from 1935 to 1945 was actually higher than the yield in California. It was somewhat higher than in California but at the present time it is about half what it is in California. Therefore that indicates that it is not a question so much of the longer growing season. As I say, I am informed by the scientific people, who should know, that one of the basic difficulties in the Okanagan is a lack of humus in the soil. All I can do is pass on that information. In any event, the situation is that whereas during that previous period the yield of tomatoes was actually a bit higher in the Okanagan than in California it is now only about 50 per cent as high