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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Spud Problems Are Discussed

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I'VE HEARD so much about potato prices and quality these past few weeks I decided to do some investigating, as it's one of the most important problems we have in this province. I want to say at once that I make no claims to knowledge on either count but I talked with men who do know.

They were C. A. Park, Ottawa, who is supervising inspector for fresh products with the department of agriculture; District Inspector Garth Harrison, who handles table stock potatoes; Alvin Hardy, senior inspector, Summerside; Jerome O'Brien who gave the dealers' viewpoint, and Marketing Director Reid Sangster.

I wanted a dealer representative present and Mr. O'Brien was chosen as it was felt he was close to the situation because he represented the P.E.I. Potato Marketing Board and presided over a session on their behalf at this year's Canadian Potato Conference in Quebec, and he would have a picture of marketing developments across the country.

THE BEST information I got was that we have an excellent potato this year so far as quality is concerned. I was assured, too, that the superior quality of Island potatoes is still recognized in our best markets. "But it won't hold that position long, unless we do something quick to step up quality, package and appearance."

Our quality has not been slipping. That was assured. It's been improving, and so has packaging and other merchandising practices. In some areas - Morell and O'Leary were mentioned as examples - Mr. O'Brien said improvement has been sensational.

Island Spurt Is Said Needed

BUT THE improvement has been even more rapid in other provinces; and they'll catch up quickly unless the Island spurts to stay in front.

A "pride in the pack" was the one thing stressed most as I talked for more than an hour with those chaps, and probed from every angle I could think of.

It's not good enough just to put up a pack that will pass the minimum requirement, that "will get by the inspector". One man was cited who boasts he has never had a bag turned down "and he never will" it was agreed, because he always goes a bit farther than the regulations demand. He never thinks of just getting by on the tolerance allowed.

I'm not trying to preach - I despise the idea of someone trying to preach at me - and I know that inspection requirements irk some people. I went through it myself when I produced poultry some years ago. But in this case, at least, there's no alternative. The competition elsewhere is getting too keen.

ONTARIO HAS been driving for some time now to become self-sufficient in potatoes. That means they have to get as good and attractive a spud as ours, or better. And they are making progress. Jerome O'Brien told me yesterday he saw in Quebec this year the best warehouse and the best packaging equipment he ever saw anywhere. He added that Quebec subsidizes liberally that sort of thing. "I only wish they were as generous here", he said with some feeling.

Packaging here is reasonably good in sizes up to 20 to 25 pounds. It's in the 50 and 75-pound bags we fall down worst, Mr. O'Brien said.

Used Bags Are Finally Out

AND THAT brought us to the final shot. It sounds like a threat, but I don't know how else you can say this. Inspectors this year will definitely adhere to the requirements for new jute bags. That received 100 per cent endorsement from dealers who met with Agriculture Minister MacRae here Wednesday night. From what was said there and what I heard yesterday, used bags are finally O-U-T.

I'll admit I make this comment with probably more hope than conviction, but it looks as though the potato industry is making progress on a drive against price cutting. Every dealer who talked with the minister and others here Wednesday, gave the idea solid endorsement. I believe steps are finally underway to let growers know at intervals what the price should be. At any rate I think the minister merits commendation for making the effort.

Dealers, Lawyers Are Not Crooks

IT'S NOT that dealers as a class are unreliable, or inefficient, though unfortunately that opinion seems to be prevalent in some areas. These men are just like the rest of us, but there are marketing problems that they haven't yet found a way to solve.

When I was a boy at home practically everyone thought lawyers were crooked. I'm serious about that. That definitely was the general feeling. I've known many lawyers well in the intervening years. And, of course, the idea is plain nonsense. They're just like the rest of us. Most of them are good, others perhaps not so good. But several of the finest and most honorable men I've ever known have been lawyers, so that explodes that theory.

Oldest Fisherman Is Visited

I VISITED recently with Vincent McGrath, Morel, a veteran of 78 years in the fishing business, who was selected last year by the P.E.I. Fisheries Federation as the province's oldest active fisherman.

Mr. McGrath proved to be a most interesting man and his story is featured in the fisheries section which appears in The Patriot this afternoon and will be in The Guardian tomorrow.

He told me among other things that he worked for 10 cents an hour, or one dollar for a ten-hour day when the City of Charlottetown was laying sewer lines many years ago.

Mr. McGrath is 90 and he was only a boy then. He recalls distinctly digging the portion that goes past the old Prowse Brothers establishment on Richmond and Queen. Other facts about this fine old gentleman will be found in the fisheries section.

Strange Animal Seen At Donaldston

I HAVE no details on this but a report yesterday from the Donaldston area told of seeing a strange black animal in that vicinity. One person suggested it was a panther, though the identification was far from definite. Another said it was a wolverine.

It reminds me of the "red-coated prowler" that was reported recently in the Elmira area. That story died out after several people were reported as having seen the "prowler" and one report reaching here described a bed that had been built in an old grain barracks. I'm naturally wondering what will come out of this Donaldston story.