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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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TANNERY - MACKENZIE DELTA.

Introduction

At the Third Session, 1963, it was suggested that the Aklavik Fur Garment Vocational Training Course, which is now a co-operative venture, might be developed into a tanning industry in the Mackenzie Delta. The Administration has been considering such a development and the following information indicates the work and planning that has been done in this regard.

The Problems

In 1959 when the Education Division established the Aklavik Fur Garment Vocational Training Course, it was soon recognized that the supply of good quality tanned furs was of economic significance to this type of project. The Aklavik training course is now a Co-operative and a second training course at Tuktoyaktuk is expected to become an integral part of what might now be described as the Mackenzie Delta Fur Garment Industry. More than ever, a supply of good quality tanned skins is an important factor affecting this industry and the people involved in it.

It is perhaps an anomaly that a major fur producing area should import this same product to support a local industry. Although many industrial empires have been founded on such principles, the high cost of transporting goods back and forth in northern Canada substantially affects any project which might be a marginal one for other reasons.

The idea of a local tannery supplying local needs from a readily available source of raw material is not a new one. The development of a tannery, however, is not something that can be organized overnight. Theory has to be worked out in practice and, to a large extent, by trial and error.

The Present Situation

The Department has received considerable help and advice from the Department of Agriculture, chemical companies, and the tanning industry itself. Experimental work has been done by Departmental staff at Inuvik, and at Fort Chimo, Quebec.

At Fort Chimo work has been done by the Industrial Division with sealskins and some of the mechanical problems solved. At Inuvik muskrats have been experimentally tanned by the Education Division and suitable formulae worked out. Both of these experimental projects have provided optimistic results with respect to the practicability of establishing a small tannery capable of producing a quantity and quality of product to meet the needs of the Mackenzie Delta Fur Garment Industry. The economics of such an operation, however, must still be determined.

In 1964 both the Industrial and Education Divisions will be working closely on a feasibility study of a local tannery operation at Aklavik. The Industrial Division will establish the plant facilities, furnish tanning materials and assign an experienced officer to give general supervision. This officer will do a detailed study of production costs.

The Education Division will provide an instructor, knowledgeable in tanning methods, to train a number of trainees in the various aspects of the operation.

The Mackenzie Delta Fur Garment Industry has a potential requirement between 25,000 and 40,000 muskrat skins annually. Trim furs would account for an additional number of pelts to be tanned.

Conclusion

This volume of business should provide a reasonably good income to several people operating the tannery and it should also result in considerable savings to the Fur Garment Co-operative. The economics of the project, however, will not be known until the study is completed.

April 16, 1964.