

Unit 9: Video 2 Transcript

Q6: Was the farming economy in Lower Canada healthy?

A: The agricultural crisis in Lower Canada, I don't know if anyone's ever settled that one. Some people say there was no crisis. Other people say there was. And other people say there was a period of transition. So this is a phrase I think economists like. It covers a whole lot of sins, and you don't have to explain a whole lot.

But I think for some places there was, there were lots of crises, and I think people eventually made—either they were forced to or made the rational choice to look for crops that were suitable for their climate and their area. But at the same time, for instance, the realities of commercialized agriculture were—the possibilities were greater around Montreal. So Montreal became a market for the agricultural products of its region. The same thing happened in Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce and the area around Quebec, but much, much later I think.

So there's different stages of development. Montreal grew much—well, it didn't grow actually that much faster than Quebec at this time, but its agriculture hinterland was better suited to commercial farming, I think. Or if it wasn't, certainly the people there made the best use of it. So you have a transition there from, away from wheat into products that city people would like. Oats for horses mostly, dairy products, what else? Some maple syrup or maple sugar, things like that.

The same thing several decades later happened in the area that I study. So was it an agricultural crisis? I think in some ways people were consuming more of the surplus, and therefore they had less money to spend on things. And so there's that appearance of poverty. But I don't know, sometimes I find these debates confusing.