

The weather conditions naturally have been reflected in the crop results as between various districts—differences in the root crops, for instance, being very marked. A noteworthy feature, however, has been the exceptionally high average per acre yield of wheat in the principal grain-growing districts, which may, indeed, constitute a Dominion record when the final returns are available. The average yield of oats is also good. Another feature is the very heavy potato crop in the South Island. Owing to the Australian embargo on the importation of New Zealand potatoes, difficulty has arisen regarding the disposal of the surplus. Apart from such measures as stimulating consumption by better distribution, especially in the North Island, the time appears to have arrived when to meet such emergencies the Dominion should be technically equipped for the manufacture of potato-flour, and for that of commercial alcohol from potatoes or other suitable crops.

The reasons, both national and economic, for New Zealand maintaining its wheat-production at least sufficiently to supply local requirements have been further strengthened by the recent course of events. Australia has demonstrated its unreliability as a source of supply, and shipping facilities in these waters have failed to keep up with the demand for tonnage, while the outside world price of wheat has risen to a level almost prohibitive judged on the standards of this country. A total area of some 300,000 acres of wheat at a normal average yield is sufficient for the Dominion's present consumption, and with reasonable encouragement this acreage can be readily grown. Reports indicate that the area sown and to be sown in wheat for the ensuing season's crop in Canterbury and North Otago will show a substantial increase on last season's acreage. With the increased minimum prices guaranteed by the Government for the crop a reasonable return should be secured by growers, given fair seasonal conditions.

Our sugar-supply is affected by economic conditions somewhat similar to those affecting wheat, and the time seems ripe for definitely taking in hand the production of beet-sugar in New Zealand. A sound start in this industry is all that is required at present, and if the anticipated success is obtained there is no reason why the dependence of the Dominion upon imported cane-sugar should not be gradually minimized. Actual tests have amply demonstrated the suitability of our lands and climate for growing beets of high sugar-content.

Turning to the live-stock position, it is satisfactory to note a gradual but steady increase in the Dominion's dairy cattle. It is true that the present lines of development of the dairy industry, leading to heavy slaughterings of newly dropped calves, is somewhat menacing in relation to the future reinforcement of the country's herds as a whole. There are indications, however, that dairy-farmers are beginning to realize the position, adopting more conservative measures and better calf-rearing methods. The returns of compulsory inoculation of calves for blackleg bear out this view, the last year's figures showing that the great decline in numbers previously recorded had been arrested in the Auckland District, and that the reduction in Taranaki had substantially diminished. The sheep situation gives cause for careful thought. A record level for the flocks in point of number was reached in 1918. In 1919 a fairly heavy decrease was shown. The present year's returns, although the final figures are not yet available, indicate a further decrease of well over a million. Causes for the downward movement can be specified, but this does not materially improve matters. The estimated number of ewes bred from in 1919 was less by several hundred thousand, while the average percentage of lambing also fell, these two factors accounting for a decreased crop of lambs amounting to one million compared with the previous year, and about one million and three-quarters as against the record of 1917. In addition, the killings at the meat-works and other slaughterhouses during the 1919-20 yearly period constituted a record, thus further affecting the returns. In view of the extremely important position occupied by sheep in the development of new country—apart from the direct production of wealth in wool and meat—a backward movement in our sheep stock is economically unsatisfactory. The demand for breeding-stock and resulting hardening of values therefor which may be anticipated should soon right the matter, but some corresponding shrinkage in the meat-export trade will probably be felt meanwhile. Another reduction in swine has to be noted. There are indications, however, that the campaign for more pig-raising on lines to meet present-day conditions in regard to foods is bearing fruit, and that an upward movement may be expected shortly.

The branches of agriculture responsible for our main primary products—meat, wool, and dairy-produce—have continued to enjoy prosperity under the system of Imperial Government purchase contracts, which were renewed for a further year. The wool-clip, however, was somewhat deficient in weight and quality as compared with that of the previous season, with a consequent lower aggregate return to the growers. In the dairy industry the expansion of cheese-manufacture has continued, over 60,000 tons having been dealt with at the grading-ports during the official year. New Zealand, in fact, has become one of the principal cheese producing and exporting countries of the world. The industry is now well equipped in general with cool storage for cheese at the various ports (largely a fortunate legacy from the war conditions), which will affect the trade very beneficially in respect to quality and saving of shrinkage. As was to be expected, butter-production shows a decrease, the raw material being not only increasingly absorbed by the cheese branch of the industry,