

available to merchants for distribution for poultry-food. A large quantity of Australian wheat has been purchased, and up to the 31st July approximately 1,670,000 bushels had been brought in and distributed throughout the Dominion. The Department will be closely engaged in the work during the remainder of the year.

In February last a conference of wheat-growers was held in Christchurch with the object of discussing the form of control, if any, which the Government should be requested to exercise in regard to the harvest of 1924–25. The conference decided that, in order to continue the encouragement of wheat-growing and to ensure the sowing of a satisfactory area in the autumn and spring of this year, the Government should be urged to revert to the system of guaranteeing prices for wheat grown in the Dominion. It was asked that the Government should undertake to guarantee minimum prices of 6s. per bushel for Tuscan varieties, 6s. 3d. for Hunters, and 6s. 6d. for Pearl. It was understood, of course, that to make any such guarantee effective the Government would have to purchase the harvest of 1924–25 and to continue to maintain the prohibition of importation. Growers were, of course, unable to give any guarantee that they would grow all the wheat required for the Dominion's use, but it was recognized that the prices named, if conceded, would ensure the production of a substantial quantity. After consideration Cabinet decided that it could not agree to guarantee prices as desired by the growers, but an undertaking was given that Parliament would be asked to increase the duty on flour from £2 10s. to £3 per ton, with the object of affording to wheat-growing approximately the same degree of protection against imported flour as is now given in the duty of 2s. per cental against imported wheat. The prohibition of importation of wheat and flour will be terminated as from the 28th February, 1925.

The price of flour has been comparatively constant at a maximum f.o.b. South of £15 10s. per ton—the price fixed at the end of October, 1922. While there have been changes in costs of other commodities used by bakers, there has been no general movement in bread-prices during the past year. The position in several centres has been under consideration by the Department during the past year, and, where necessary, adjustments in price have been made. The baking trade shows a strong tendency towards combined action for the purpose of eliminating price-cutting; and, while competition is keen in some centres, the establishment of large bakeries and the strengthening of trade organization may tend towards the maintenance of bread-prices slightly above those which would otherwise rule.

It became evident in March last that the demand for supplies of bran and pollard had overtaken the production of the New Zealand mills, and shortages were causing difficulty, particularly in the North Island. Following the course adopted last year, the Government agreed to the importation of these commodities under permits issued on the recommendation of this Department. The Government also agreed to the suspension of the duty on bran and pollard so long as the shortage exists. Under this arrangement bran and pollard has been brought in from Australia to be sold at prices which have not seriously disturbed the level of prices for locally produced bran and pollard as fixed under the agreement between millers and wheat-growers. The position as to importations is being watched by the Department, and when it is clear that the local mills can meet the demand the issue of permits for importation will cease.

CONCLUSION.

Whilst this report covers the more important duties assigned to the Department, it by no means records the whole of the diversified work undertaken. The staff of the Department is small in number, and the drastic "cut" made early in 1922 has resulted in making it necessary to concentrate on the more essential duties and leave some of the statutory functions practically untouched. With the expansion of trade and industry, however, it has become increasingly evident that the expert staff to conduct economic and accountancy investigations should be increased, and representations in this regard have been made to the Government. To the limits of its capacity the Department is endeavouring to check unfair methods of trading, the operations of trusts and combines, and to carry on the constructive side of its work in fostering and promoting the commerce and industries of New Zealand.

Despite the checks of the past few years, the industries of the Dominion are steadily progressing, and the fact that the value of output of the secondary and extractive industries has reached nearly £50,000,000 is both a revelation and a source of gratification to our citizens. But with the provision of hydro-electric power to an ever-increasing extent annually, this production can be greatly augmented, and manufacturers look to the future with confidence and aver that it can be obtained at lessened cost—with the aid of "white" coal and larger outputs. If the people of the Dominion will support their own industries and, all things being equal, buy New-Zealand-made goods, then there can be no doubt that it will be the main factor in aiding a complete restoration of our national prosperity.

For the Department of Industries and Commerce,

J. W. COLLINS, Secretary.

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