

were, in fact, at certain periods so high as to press harshly upon consumers. Such farming industries as poultry and pig-raising were, under such circumstances, seriously affected. On the other hand, when overseas values fell to relatively low figures the specific duties gave inadequate protection to wheat-growers. The instability in the position was itself a factor which tended to restrict wheat-production. When the tariff was revised last year it was decided to make the duty to some extent dependent upon price-levels, and consequently as overseas values rise the duty now falls. Conversely, when world-market values decline the duties (and the need for protection) increase.

It is, of course, recognized that the new duties, like any duty which might be imposed, cannot protect or assist the wheat-grower while there is a surplus of wheat on the local market, and, while the so-called sliding-scale duties will tend towards price-stabilization within the Dominion, there are a number of factors other than the tariff which enter into the determination of the price which growers will receive from time to time.

The production of wheat in the Dominion is, of course, appreciably affected by the weather conditions experienced during the planting, growing, and harvesting seasons of each year. During the past two productive years conditions have been such as to bring about a particularly high yield per acre, and, though the acreages sown would not have been by any means sufficient had the yield been no greater than on the average of past figures, production per acre in each of the past two seasons has been so high as to result in a total yield approximately adequate to the national needs. Some importation continues, but the chief reason lies in the alleged necessity of having available flour of a "stronger" baking-quality than can at present be produced from the bulk of the locally-grown wheats.

An endeavour is now being made to improve the milling-qualities of the wheat produced in the Dominion. A research committee, upon which this Department is represented, will, with financial assistance from bakers, millers, and the Government, endeavour to determine upon and produce for seed purposes grain of desirable characteristics. The committee will have a considerable field of work apart from this particular matter, but its activities will generally be directed towards improving the present practices both in the field and in the mills and bakehouses.

The following table shows the quantity and value of wheat and flour imported in each month of the year ended February, 1928 :—

*Importations of Wheat and Flour into New Zealand.—Season 1927–28.*

Month.	Wheat.		Flour.	
	Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
	Bushels.	£	Tons.	£
March .. .. .	49,128	14,862	1,598	21,407
April .. .. .	..	..	584	8,968
May .. .. .	6,223	1,904	840	11,627
June .. .. .	43	9	835	11,689
July .. .. .	16,195	5,307	806	11,168
August .. .. .	..	..	853	11,788
September .. .. .	1,553	513	795	14,935
October .. .. .	6,623	2,462	478	7,606
November .. .. .	55,313	18,478	832	12,246
December .. .. .	23,077	7,395	396	5,617
January .. .. .	64,738	12,201	821	12,565
February .. .. .	450,873	137,405	628	9,671
Totals for season .. .. .	673,766	200,536	9,466	139,287

Together, the imports of wheat and flour last year represent an amount approximately equivalent to New Zealand's flour-consumption for two months. A substantial proportion of the wheat-imports of February last will, however, be used in mixture with local wheat to improve the quality of Dominion-made flour. From these figures it will be appreciated that even when New Zealand's wheat-production reaches a high figure—as was the case last year—some importation will continue.

The importations in the previous year—1926–27—were, by reason of a definite and substantial shortage in Dominion production, much higher than in the year just ended. Wheat to an amount of 1,691,192 bushels (valued at £569,280) and 31,369 tons of flour (valued at £477,715) entered the Dominion during the year ended February, 1927.

Prices of wheat and flour in Australia are of continuous interest to New Zealand wheat-producers and traders, and, while the new scale of duties tends to make Australian price-movements of less importance than was the case in past years, the Department continues to receive and record from the Commonwealth detailed information on these matters.

Wheat prices in May of last year ranged around 5s. 9d. per bushel free on board, sacks in, with flour quoted for export at about £12 per ton. The market tended to harden during June, July, August, and September, until in the latter month values for export were about 6s. for wheat and £12 10s. for flour. Prices went a little higher during October, more particularly in New South