

wounded soldiers and air-raid victims, a great scarcity has arisen. The Imperial Government has asked New Zealand to send all possible supplies for urgent requirements.

Many tons of first quality ergot go to waste every summer in the swamp areas of New Zealand. Ergot is worth just now up to 8s. a pound in money value, but is worth infinitely more in terms of human lives and suffering. It is obviously the duty of everyone who has the opportunity to collect every pound for despatch to Britain.

How to Collect Ergots

The collection of ergots is very simple, and can well be done by children during the Christmas holidays, as the ergots ripen in January. It is probable that the fastest method would be to work in teams, as for cocksfoot seeding, cutting the tall fescue heads with a sickle, and subsequently collecting, threshing, and winnowing. The ergots should not be broken or damaged in any way, as this detracts very much from their value. They are very easily parted from the seed head, especially if the latter is allowed to dry somewhat, so that a light blow with the grass-head across a horizontal



Fig. 3.—Smut on prairie grass.
Left: smutted; right: healthy.

piece of wood should usually suffice and give the minimum amount of seed to clean out afterwards.

Careful cleaning for market is essential, as the final sample must be quite free from seed, straw, or rubbish—that is, it must consist of ergots only.

It is very important to dry the cleaned ergots quickly and thoroughly either by spreading out in the wind and sun or inside. Ergots should never be packed to send away while any dampness remains. When dry, they should be packed in airtight tins or other suitable containers and consigned to any grain, seed, and produce merchant in the district, who will assess the value according to quality and condition, and return a cheque for the value. For good quality, well-cleaned ergot 8s a pound will be paid or 6d. an ounce.

Although ergots are poisonous if swallowed in any quantity, they are perfectly safe to handle in collecting, threshing, and packing.

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