

FERTILISERS AND PASTORAL FARMING

NEW ZEALAND is a country of pastoral farming, and it is the products of pastoral farming—meat and dairy produce—that are so urgently required by our kinsfolk in Britain. At this period of the year it may be helpful to review what should be done if the utmost use is to be made of pastoral lands during 1947-48 and succeeding seasons. Owing to the shortages of wire and other materials, our pastoral area cannot immediately be enlarged, but I feel a great deal can be done to increase the productive capacity of existing grasslands and improve the feeding of and lessen the mortality in flocks and herds. The Government, in negotiation with other countries, is doing its utmost to overcome the shortages of wire and other essential materials.

For the 1947-48 season the total phosphatic fertilisers available will be about 748,000 tons, which is a greater quantity than the Dominion has ever used before. While it is not sufficient to meet the full demands of farming, it is sufficient to raise the topdressing allocation by a third above the previous year's allocation and should enable farmers to increase both butterfat and meat production. However, to make the fullest use of the increased fertiliser ration, increased attention must be paid to the provision of winter feed. This is most essential in dairy farming, as it has been clearly demonstrated that the level of winter feeding has a very direct influence on seasonal butterfat production. For adequate supplementary feeding, two-thirds of a ton to a ton of hay or hay equivalent is required for each dairy cow. Many districts save considerably less, and the fullest use cannot be made of existing pasture lands and dairy herds until winter feeding receives closer attention.

The production from developed ploughable lands can also be increased by the resowing of worn-out pastures with seed of the highly-productive strains of grasses and clovers which are now available. Such a programme would fit in well with the increased fertiliser ration, especially as the ration for new grass has now been raised to 3cwt. an acre in the North Island and 2cwt. in the South Island. The higher topdressing allocation will increase the productivity of grasslands generally and will be reflected in the need for more stock. A ploughing-up programme in which a winter fodder crop is taken before the land is sown in grass would help with the very necessary provision of winter feed; existing flocks and herds would thus not only be better fed, but provision would also be made for subsequent increased carrying capacity.

Apart from better feeding the next most important factor which would lead to increased meat and dairy production would be the reduction of stock mortality. I believe this could be brought about partly by better feeding and care and partly by fuller use of the veterinary and other instructional services available. I know the present services are not quite adequate, and steps are being taken by my Department and the Meat and Dairy Boards to rectify the position, but I feel that the

fullest use of the services available would help to reduce the mortality rates which annually cause a serious loss to our pastoral industries, and I am keen to co-operate with the Veterinary Council in order that stock mortality may be reduced to the minimum.

These then I feel are the essentials in an endeavour to increase production at the present moment: the fullest use must be made of existing pasture lands, flocks, and herds, and the foundation on which this must be based is the co-ordination of increased fertiliser usage with better feeding. I am anxious that all sections of the community should co-operate for greater production.

It may seem that in thus repeating the basis of increased pastoral production I am stressing the obvious, but I feel that the position must be put to all farmers so that the need for individual stocktaking is not overlooked. This increased fertiliser ration is at the moment a very precious commodity; its potential for increased production is great, and individually and collectively we have a responsibility to see that it is used to the best advantage.

Further, I wish to point out that farmers in doubt about the most efficient method of using their increased fertiliser ration, of renewing grassland, of fodder crop production, or of livestock feeding should make the fullest use of the instructional and research services of the Department of Agriculture. The advice of the instructional service is based both on carefully-conducted research and close observation of the best local farm management methods. Topdressing, regrassing, and the feeding of livestock all involve certain local farm problems, and in the solution of these the Department's agricultural instructors can be very helpful.

The Government is doing everything possible to expedite fertiliser deliveries and has arranged for the integration of road, rail, and sea transport in an endeavour to see that the farmer's essential fertiliser rations are supplied in good time. The smooth distribution of fertiliser will require the fullest co-operation from all farmers to see that railway trucks are cleared as rapidly as possible. It is not generally realised that the quantity of fertilisers and lime now being transported by the Railways Department is greatly in excess of the pre-war tonnage; for the year ended March 31, 1947, the Railways Department transported 1,638,000 tons of fertilisers and lime, over 30 per cent. greater than the quantity carried in 1938-39.

As Minister of Agriculture I am fully aware of the difficulties, mainly concerned with shortages of certain essential materials, which farmers are facing in their endeavour to increase production. During the coming season, however, the phosphatic fertiliser allocation will be larger than ever before. This will give us one of the essential tools for increased production. Let us make the best use of it.

EDWARD CULLEN, Minister of Agriculture.