

## FARM PRODUCTION DRIVE . . .

pool accounts built up for the farmers' own use and protection, sufficient to meet the threat of falling overseas returns and to guarantee the maintenance of farmers' standards.

"Thus moderation and restraint combined with foresight brought our farmers to the post-war years in a position of stability prepared to move fast into maximum expansion.

### Recent Background

"With the threat of collapse in our principal market in Britain," said Mr. Walsh, "came the setting up in 1947 of our Aid for Britain National Council, which has played a most valuable part in stimulating our food production to meet the crisis. The members of this council, representing every interest in our community, farming, commercial, manufacturing, and labouring, have worked together in a notable spirit of comradeship which is both a credit to the individual members and a most important guide to what can be achieved in a truly national spirit in our country's future. Shortages delaying production were tackled vigorously. With the co-operation of Federated Farmers vitally needed farm machinery was obtained from dollar or sterling sources, wherever the best machinery was available. Materials necessary to open up new land or fully develop existing holdings were sought out in every world market, and fencing wire, galvanised piping, fertilisers, and every farm need were kept moving to those in greatest need. Special weekend fertiliser trains to speed supplies to the farms, subsidised hay relief schemes for drought- or flood-stricken areas, and hundreds of minor problems were tackled promptly and effectively.

"Federated Farmers, the farmers' own organisation, realising the importance of machinery to the modern farmer, not only in giving greater production but in taking the drudgery out of farming, organised, in 1947-48, a Dominion wide survey of farm machinery needs, and with the assistance of the Aid for Britain National Council took the resulting requests to the Government, who speedily granted dollar funds and sterling licences to the limit of farmers' needs.

### Long-term Agreements

"By 1948," Mr. Walsh continued, "New Zealand had entered into long-term agreements with the British Government, who agreed to take, over a 7-year period, all the meat and dairy produce that our farmers could export, at regulated prices which would not vary by more than 7½ per cent. up or down annually. This bulk-purchase agreement is a first-class example of the form of action recommended by the Annual Conference of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers referred to previously, where they unanimously resolved that 'a basic method of achieving expanding international trade in agricultural products at stable prices should be intergovernmental commodity agreements.' In return for this gain the British Government asked that we should produce and export as much meat and dairy produce as we could, and our representatives agreed to aim at a 20 per cent. increase in dairy production and the export of 50,000 more tons of meat by 1955, when the agreement expires. The latest development, which this year obtained for our farmers a 7½ per cent. increase on the 1947-48 agreement prices, has already given production another grand incentive. The conclusion of this long-term agreement was another turning point in our farming history and opened the door wide to further rapid expansion.

### Farm Production Committee

"To assist the farmers in their efforts to meet these commitments the Government set up a Farm Production Committee to investigate methods of increasing production and to make recommendations to the Government. This committee consists of the Chairman of the Aid for Britain National Council, Mr. F. P. Walsh, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture, Mr. E. J. Fawcett, the Director of Marketing, Mr. L. C. Webb, the Secretary to the Treasury, Mr. B. C. Ashwin, and the Secretary of Labour, Mr. H. L. Bockett. To assist the committee the Department of Agriculture has provided a secretariat whose exceptional work in the preparation of valuable report material has been a major factor in enabling the committee to obtain quick and effective action.

### Fertilisers

"The first result was rapid. The committee came to the Government with proposals for an immediate expansion of fertiliser supply as the key to increases. After consulting with the Dairy and Meat Boards the Government came to a quick decision providing for the financing of a new fertiliser works in Napier and looking to the building of two further works elsewhere. Already the plans for the Napier works are drawn up and building should start soon. Secondly, to cover the period until the new works could boost our fertiliser supplies, arrangements were made for large-scale imports to be subsidised so that farmers could immediately place orders for fertiliser the use of which became reasonably economic to them. This move has had an important effect, and deliveries of something like 50,000 tons of basic slag are already under way. North African rock phosphate also is in good supply, with at least four ships at present loading or en route.

### Farm Machinery

"Following the fertiliser action," said Mr. Walsh, "came further rapid action on farm machinery. Federated Farmers had taken in 1949 another full survey of needs and presented detailed requests to the Government for further imports for 1950, both from dollar and sterling areas. Realising that a good part of this machinery would be urgently needed for the 1949-50 harvest, the Farm Production Committee strongly recommended to the Government that advance arrangements be made to get in haymaking and harvesting machinery before the end of 1949. This was agreed to and this machinery, portion of the 1950 allocation, is already in part on the water. More recently the Government has announced that further large allocations covering the first half of 1950 have been agreed to, so that the machinery available in 1950, particularly from dollar sources, is likely to meet the farmers' requests almost in full once again.

"What this means in terms of mechanising our farms is clear from a brief glance to pre-war days. Prior to the war our farmers owned some 8000 farm tractors. Today they possess over 24,000. Prior to the war farm tractor imports averaged about 1000 per year. In 1945 and on to 1947 this rose to about 2000 to 3000 per year. With the impetus of the expansion plans 6000 were imported in 1948, 7000 in 1949, and as many again will come in in 1950. This must have a tremendous effect, and combined with the other farm machinery imports designed for use with the tractors will give production a wonderful fillip in the next few years.

### Farm Labour

"After farm machinery came labour. The Government's immigration plans have already brought in farm workers from the United Kingdom in useful numbers, but there is a limit to the number of farm workers we are prepared or desire to lift from Britain's own farm lands. Federated Farmers have recently given attention to obtaining skilled Dutch farm workers and arranged with the Government earlier for one hundred of these to be brought in. More recently they came to Aid for Britain to seek help in having this number doubled, and to this the Government has now agreed, so that by the time our season is properly under way 200 of these men will be engaged on our farms.

"But there is a limit to the speed at which farm labour from overseas can be fed into our farm economy, and the final answer is to draw our own workers on to the farms and to retain them there when they arrive. This depends upon better housing, better home amenities, better schools, better road access, a better and wider community life, and upon similar factors which are being steadily attended to.

### Housing

"Already," said Mr. Walsh, "the rural housing figures are showing striking changes. Before the war houses erected in rural areas averaged about a steady 1600 per year. Last year permits were issued for the erection of over 5000 houses in rural areas. With the easing of building shortages this figure will be maintained and exceeded, until our rural workers enjoy the same standards of housing, with every electrical convenience, that the city dweller now enjoys. The Government has agreed that the policy of building rental houses in rural areas will be further expanded, and the various ways in which this policy can best be applied are being studied.