

# Britain's Vigorous Agriculture Today Threatens Our Economy

**A** WARNING that the performance and potentials of the British farmer in meat production threatened not only our national economy but the way of life of the New Zealand sheep farmer was given by Dr C. P. McMeekan, Superintendent of the Department of Agriculture's Ruakura Animal Research Station, in a paper he gave at the Ruakura Farmers' Conference Week recently. As the result of his visit this year to Britain on an Underwood Fellowship offered by the British Agricultural Research Council Dr McMeekan was able to study British farming conditions and to observe the sweeping changes which have taken place in agriculture in the United Kingdom in the last 20 years. His conclusions regarding the effect these changes are having and the programme he considers should be followed to overcome the problem facing the New Zealand meat industry are set out in his paper below. Another paper which he gave at the conference about the impact of British milk production methods on our dairy industry appears later in this issue.

**N**ORMALLY a discussion of British meat production would be of but passing interest. Our climate is so different, our techniques so specialised, and our production pattern so limited that the British farmer with his widely diversified farming systems has been remote and somehow unimportant to us. Today the picture has radically changed. Today, as never in history, his performance and potentials threaten not only our national economy but our own way of life as farmers. For this reason this address, along with its follow-up to dairymen,

is probably the most important I have ever been called on to make.

You are well aware of the reality of the current price depression in dairying—a situation due in no small measure to the rapidly expanded dairy industry of the United Kingdom. I would not be meeting my responsibilities today if I failed to impress on you the comparable dangers to New Zealand sheep farmers inherent in existing and potential meat production programmes of Britain.

## Present Production Pattern

While at Cambridge School of Agriculture from mid 1936 to the end of



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Dr C. P. McMeekan, Superintendent of the Department of Agriculture's Ruakura Animal Research Station, Hamilton, who was awarded the order C.B.E. for services to agricultural science in the recently announced Birthday Honours. Dr McMeekan was appointed in charge at Ruakura in 1943 and his own work and that of his staff on animal problems, particularly those relating to livestock farming in New Zealand, have been of great benefit to farmers and have won wide recognition of the Station's research at home and overseas.

▼ A flock of Hampshire Down sheep on a Cotswold pasture in Gloucestershire.



1938 I was able to see most phases of British farming. Though the visit just completed was all too short to see and learn more than a fraction of what I would have liked, it was possible in 4,000 rural miles to observe the fantastic change that has occurred in the British agricultural scene. For the change is fantastic.

Twenty-two years ago British farming was just beginning to emerge from the great depression of the 1930s. Millions of acres were either derelict or poorly used. Buildings, farm equipment, and general facilities were in bad shape. Methods were antiquated. Farm labour was poorly paid and relatively inefficient. Tuberculosis, contagious abortion, and mastitis in cattle were rife. Pastures were neglected and contributed but little to livestock production. Grass silage was known mainly in text books. Low-yielding Shorthorns dominated the dairy world. Cows were still milked by hand. Imported foodstuffs provided two feeds out of every three of all farm animals. Research stations were few in number, poorly equipped, and understaffed. Above all the net