

Prior to the introduction of sale by weight, lemons were quoted for on a "per dozen" basis, but quotations are now "per pound."

Apples: Quotations are collected for the four main centres by district officers of the Internal Marketing Division. Prices are sampled at intervals over a period of two weeks nearest to the 15th of the month for which the return is made, and then averaged. It is not practicable to measure the price of all varieties and kinds of apples sold. Those varieties in predominant supply, of the most popular grade and size, were therefore determined for each month of the year as a basis for the collection of price-quotations.

An average price for each selected variety is computed for each centre. These are added and divided by 4, giving an average price for each variety for all four centres combined. An average price for all varieties combined is then derived by applying fixed weights representing the quantities of each variety marketed in the Dominion during the corresponding month of 1942.

To obtain the sub-group index for fresh fruit, aggregate civil consumption weights are applied as for the other food sub-groups. The weight for lemons makes allowance for other citrus fruit, and the weight for apples makes allowance for pears.

Fresh Vegetables.—The Fresh Vegetables sub-group comprises carrots, parsnips, swedes, and cabbage. (Potatoes and onions are included in the Groceries sub-group.)

The inclusion of fresh vegetables in a retail index is commonly avoided owing to the well-known difficulties of obtaining continuous and comparable price-quotations. The Index Committee considered that the reasons for excluding fresh vegetables from the Wartime Prices Index were outweighed by the need for providing for some price-measurement of such an important element in the cost of living, and took steps to meet these difficulties:

(a) By selecting vegetables generally available throughout the year:

(b) By recommending that the selected vegetables should be sold at retail by weight so that comparable price statistics could be obtained. This recommendation was adopted and all four vegetables are sold by weight.

The question of early varieties of vegetable gave rise to certain difficulties. It is, however, the policy of the Government that in wartime, in circumstances where adequate supplies of main crop or alternative vegetables are available, the production and consumption of "out-of-season" varieties should be discouraged and regarded in the light of luxury items. In accord with this policy the Index Committee decided that where for any period adequate main crop supplies are normally available, and early varieties form only a small proportion of the total available supply, then the latter varieties should be excluded from measurement in the index as being of the nature of luxuries. Where, however, early varieties normally form for any period of the year an appreciable proportion of the available supply of the vegetable, then they are included in the index, the price-quotations for main crop and early varieties being weighted according to their estimated consumptive importance for the period.

Price-quotations for fresh vegetables are collected for the four main centres by local officers of the Price Tribunal. Prices are sampled twice within the week nearest to the 15th of the month for which the return is made. Every sample at each centre covers three urban and two suburban shops.

An average price of each vegetable is computed for each centre. These are then added and divided by 4, giving an average price for each vegetable for all four centres combined. To obtain the sub-group index the appropriate commodity weights are applied to the average prices as for other sub-groups. As noted above, the commodity weights for fresh vegetables represent not aggregate civil consumption, but the proportions in which, in the opinion of the Index Committee, the respective vegetables are purchased. These are: carrots, 3; parsnips, 1; swedes, 1; cabbage, 3; total, 8. The weight for cabbage makes allowance also for silver beet.

The principal differences between the food regimens of the Wartime Prices Index and the Government Statistician's retail index are as under:—

Groceries.—The wartime prices index excluded tinned fish and certain lines of tinned and dried fruits on the grounds of non-availability. It also excluded sago, tapioca, cocoa, treacle, and pepper, but introduced rolled oats and baking-powder.

Dairy-produce and Meat.—Regimens identical.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.—The addition of this new group to the Wartime Prices Index represents the most important difference between the two food regimens.

FUEL AND LIGHT GROUP

This group is represented by coal, coke, gas, and electricity. Candles and kerosene were omitted as being unimportant elements in the modern household budget. Firewood was also omitted owing to the difficulty of securing really significant and comparable price statistics.

The Government Statistician's retail-price data are used, quotations being obtained for the four main centres at the 15th of the month by the local Inspectors of Factories.

Coal.—Coal-dealers quote for those types of household and kitchen coal most frequently sold in their locality. The quotations thus refer to coal of various kinds, but all quotations are in respect of coal used for domestic purposes.

Gas.—Quotations are given by gas undertakings for the net cost of 1,000 cubic feet of gas used for domestic heating, cooking, and lighting.

Electricity.—Quotations are given by municipal electricity authorities for the net cost of 23 units of electricity per month used for domestic heating, cooking, and lighting (heating and cooking, 16 units; lighting, 7 units).

Coke.—Quotations are given by coal-dealers for household coke.

To derive the group index an average price for each item is computed for each centre. These are added and divided by 4, giving an average price for each item for all four centres combined. The appropriate aggregate civil consumption weights are then applied to the average prices.

RENT GROUP

No special collection of rent data is made for the Wartime Prices Index, the Government Statistician's semi-annual collection made in February and August of each year being utilized. The general level of rents moves sluggishly, and it has not been deemed necessary to collect data at more frequent intervals. The rent questionnaires cover twenty-five centres of population, the number of returns for