

Dominion, has not been unsatisfactory, natural conditions militated in several directions against a full measure of success. The great cropping region of Canterbury experienced the third dry season in succession, and drouthy conditions also visited the fertile Wellington - West Coast and Taranaki districts to an unusual degree during the summer months. On the other hand, in the northern districts the rainfall was excessive for best all-round results. Other important producing districts of the Dominion, however, such as Southland and Hawke's Bay, were favoured with splendid seasons, thus helping to maintain the average. The general results of the year once more demonstrate the wonderful capabilities of New Zealand in primary production, and the splendid resources possessed by the country for development and improvement.

New Zealand is in such eminent degree a food producing and exporting country that it might be thought to be quite free of food problems in relation to its own population. The war, however, has shown up a weak spot in our agricultural economy in connection with the crop which western civilization commonly regards as the most essential foodstuff—namely, wheat. For a number of years past there has been an irregular but none the less definite decline in wheat-growing in the Dominion. The causes are well known and need not be discussed here. The main factor—the more payable nature of other crops or lines of farming—has been added to since the commencement of the war by that of the growing scarcity or uncertainty of the supply of agricultural labour. In the 1916–17 season the area devoted to wheat showed a heavy fall as compared with the increased acreage of the previous year. The result of this, combined with a comparatively low average yield owing to unfavourable weather conditions, has been an actual shortage of wheat for the Dominion's consumption. Had we been living in a time of peace and tranquility this state of affairs need not have caused much concern, on the assumption that either Australia or the American Continent would always be able to supply our comparatively small requirements even if our own wheat-growing declined to vanishing-point. But in the midst of a world war, with unknown economic developments ahead, dependence on overseas supplies of the "staff of life" could not be accepted. In view of the gravity of the issue I made a special appeal to our agriculturists to rise patriotically to the occasion and sow sufficient areas in wheat this year to at least supply the Dominion's requirements on a normal average yield; I also carried out a campaign of addresses to farmers in the principal wheat-growing districts. At the same time an assurance was given that a minimum price of 5s. 10d. per bushel would be guaranteed by the Government for the 1917–18 crop. It is a matter for great satisfaction that the practical response of the farmers promises a very substantially increased acreage, and with fair natural conditions an ample production should result. Our aim as regards wheat should be to do something more than provide from hand to mouth. A good reserve is highly desirable, even should it involve the provision of special storage. It may be recorded that the shortage of wheat in the Dominion has necessitated, since the close of the official year, a purchase by the Government of wheat in Australia.

The foregoing observations apply more or less generally to other cereals coming within the agricultural operations of the country—namely, oats, barley, and maize. Especially important is it that our production of oats be maintained at an adequate level. The acreage of this crop also shrunk seriously last season. A comparatively poor yield served to demonstrate that the margin had been cut too fine, and Australia had to be drawn upon by private trade for supplementary supplies. Considered in conjunction with the improving animal husbandry of the country, a reasonable surplus of oats should not be viewed with anxiety by our farmers, even though export facilities may be curtailed. Far greater quantities in one form or another could be profitably fed to stock. New Zealand has also been an importer of maize during the year.

While the Dominion has maintained during the year the high general standard of health of its live-stock, there are still directions in which special vigilance and efforts are required for the prevention and repression of disease. Tuberculosis, contagious abortion in dairy cows, and blackleg may be mentioned in this category. As regards blackleg, the incidence of which now especially concerns parts of the Auckland District, active measures are in hand to bring the disease under the same successful control as in Taranaki. It is very satisfactory to note that stud-stock breeding is proceeding in expanding degree, and importations of high-class purebred animals continue to be made despite war conditions. An increasing overseas demand for our stud stock, especially sheep, has also been evidenced, but shipping difficulties have limited export business. An excellent feature in connection with breeding is the strong move for co-ordination and co-operation among the various breeders' associations in the Dominion. As regards the numerical strengths of the flocks and herds, while the 1916 returns disclosed some