

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

The agricultural and pastoral industries of the Dominion have been well maintained during the year, having again had the stable support of the system of Imperial Government purchase of our main primary staples.

Good cereal crops were harvested, but the acreage for wheat showed a marked decrease compared with the previous year. In 1918-19, 210,775 acres were shown, as against an estimated total of 142,960 acres for the 1919-20 season. It is worthy of note that in the earlier days of New Zealand there was a large exportation of wheat (in 1885 nearly five million bushels were sent away). The development of sheep-farming and dairying has affected the industry, and other causes have also contributed to the steady decline in the production of the cereal during the past few years.

The difficulties experienced by the Government in transporting to the Dominion the wheat purchased in Australia, as well as the present outlook of the world's markets, prove conclusively that every encouragement should and will be given to farmers to increase the production of this very important cereal. Owing to the fact that vessels used for the conveyance of wheat purchased in Australia were continually being diverted to coal-carrying purposes, some delay has taken place in lifting this wheat, but it is confidently expected that before long the shipping difficulty will be somewhat easier and that all the wheat will be lifted before the contract expires.

The sheep returns of 1919 showed a small decrease compared with the previous year's record—this being no doubt due to the very severe winter experienced throughout the country, particularly in the high back country in the Canterbury Province.

Cattle have substantially increased, owing to the continued expansion of the dairy industry. It is, however, to be regretted that in many districts dairy-farmers are killing off practically all calves. If this slaughter of young stock continues, dairy cows are going to become very dear, and many farmers might find themselves, with the combination of unfavourable circumstances, in a very unenviable position. A note of warning to dairy-farmers is therefore sounded in this connection.

The output of cheese shows a substantial increase, while butter has correspondingly decreased. This is no doubt due to the increased manufacture of dried milk, the latest development being that of combined skim-milk powder and butter making. This business has excellent prospects, within limits, but care should be taken not to overload the market before its capacity is fully tested. Sugar of milk has been depressed, but casein is in demand, and condensed-milk manufacture is also in a good position.

The stock slaughtered for freezing for export showed substantial increases over the previous year in cattle, sheep, and lambs. With the heavy stocks left in store from the previous season, these killings have severely taxed the storage capacity of the freezing-works, notwithstanding the additions made thereto. The export of meat during the calendar year 1919 was greater than that of any previous year.

Among the important by-products of the meat industry, tallow sold at exceptionally good prices during the greater part of the year.

Owing to unfavourable climatic conditions in certain parts of the Dominion the wool-clip was markedly lighter than in the previous year, and the aggregate returns to growers will be lower in consequence.

The fruit industry has continued to expand in spite of the protracted closing of export outlets owing to the shipping-shortage. The area in commercial orchards is about 37,000 acres. The Government is interesting itself in a scheme for improving the marketing-conditions in connection with New-Zealand-grown fruit which will ensure a more adequate return to the grower, and at the same time enable the consumer to obtain regular supplies at reasonable prices. This scheme deals with the wholesale and retail distribution of fruit. With regard to the exportable surplus of fruit, every assistance has been given to growers to open up suitable markets, and the recent shipments of apples and pears to the United Kingdom, being the first for some years, produced excellent results.