

herds. The annual statistics taken in January last show an increase of another 100,000 dairy cows in the Dominion, bringing the total number to over 50 per cent. higher than five years ago. The markets for butter and cheese have shown great fluctuations during the past year, but average returns for the whole season should be satisfactory to the producers. The aggregate exports from all branches of the industry for 1922-23 are valued at between sixteen and seventeen millions sterling.

An excellent account may also be given of our great pastoral farming interests, more particularly as regards the dominant sheep section. After recording for several successive years a decrease in the Dominion's sheep-stocks, it is very gratifying to be able to note that a turn has taken place, the preliminary returns as at 30th April last showing the substantial increase of over seven hundred thousand head compared with 1922. The exact position cannot be arrived at until the complete returns are ready, but it promises well that breeding-ewes have shown an increase in the two previous years. Another high average lambing-percentage was recorded last spring, and lamb-fattening for export has been carried out on a big scale during the season, in spite of difficult conditions of weather and feed at times. On the other hand, there has been a considerable drop in mutton-killings at the freezing-works, due partly to a shortage of wethers and partly to the high prices ruling for breeding-sheep. High average prices have ruled for fat lambs and sheep for export throughout the season—at times, indeed, above current British market parity. Wool has continued to appreciate in value—steadily for medium and coarse sorts, and more rapidly for the finer qualities—record prices, in fact, having been touched in certain of the latter sorts. The value of the Dominion clip for the year is placed at some twelve millions sterling, an increase of considerably over four millions compared with the previous twelve months. Having regard to the heavy shrinkage of the last few years in the world's sheep-stocks, the statistical position of wool-growing may be regarded as very sound. The beef-market has remained very depressed, although even in this section there has been some renewed activity, exports having exceeded those of the previous season. Prospects seem to have been somewhat better latterly, and it may be hoped that cattle-grazing, which is so important a factor in good pasture-management, will be maintained in proper degree. As regards pigs, the last returns record another substantial increase; the export of frozen pork has also shown expansion this season. Altogether the pastoral section—wool, meat, skins, tallow, and other by-products combined—takes the lead as regards value in the Dominion's export list for the past year.

As regards arable farming, the area under wheat for the 1922-23 season represented a considerable decrease from the exceptionally high area of the preceding year, but the average yield per acre was good. Similar remarks apply to the oat crop. Another heavy shrinkage was recorded in area under barley; the rye-grass area harvested for seed was also very much less. On the other hand, the linseed area was nearly doubled. Other crops of which preliminary statistics are at present available do not show any marked movement in area or yield. The Government control of the sale of wheat, which had been in force for several years, came to an end with the 1921-22 crop. An agreement has been entered into between the wheat-growers and the flour-millers governing prices for the past season's crop.

The hemp (phormium-fibre) industry has been passing through a period of depression, largely influenced by disease in the phormium-plant. The millers are dealing with the matter of improvement in a very practical way, and the Department is also aiding in research work. The marked shrinkage in the production of fibre recorded for the last few years appears, however, to have been arrested, and renewed development of the industry may be anticipated.

The development of the fruitgrowing industry has been hampered by marketing difficulties, but it is hoped that a system of voluntary standardization now being introduced will prove to be the forerunner of stable prosperity. The export trade in apples has registered another increase in volume this year; average returns from the British market, however, seem likely to be disappointing. The marketing of