

The poultry-keeper can help himself in getting a higher production per bird?—Yes. So far as specialist poultry-farms are concerned, the greater the number of birds kept the lower is the average production of eggs per bird.

Is that so?—Yes, the greater the number of birds kept the lower the production, the higher production being procured from those flocks round about one hundred birds.

Mr. Bitchener.] With regard to the ration of 1 bushel of wheat, is it a bushel or its equivalent in some grain, or a bushel of wheat without anything else?—The average ration on specialist poultry-farms is a bushel of wheat, plus other products, such as bran, pollard, lucerne-meal, and perhaps a certain amount of oats in different localities. The type of food varies according to the localities in which poultry-farming takes place, but the average amount of food consumed per bird is in the vicinity of 100 lb. of one sort or another per annum.

In regard to the egg-production, it seems to me to be a low average: I thought the average would be higher than nine dozen eggs per bird per annum.—I am crediting New Zealand with the highest egg-production in the world. An average of nine dozen eggs is a very high production over the whole flock. With adverse climatic conditions it might be only six and a half dozen. Great Britain averages about nine dozen.

We are not any better off than Great Britain?—From all the information which I have been able to obtain, we are in the same position approximately as Great Britain. On certain specialist poultry-farms we do get a higher production; but the greatest number of our poultry-keepers in New Zealand are not specialist poultry-farmers—they have back-yard farms, as it were, and poultry-keeping is merely a side line.

Mr. Jones.] What are you representing?—I was asked to come here from the Department of Agriculture. At the present time I am engaged in a complete investigation into the poultry industry, and my report on that subject will be ready within the course of the next few weeks. I am trying more or less to determine the position of the poultry industry, and to offer any suggestions for its improvement.

Is it possible to find out what proportion of the fowls are on the farmers' own property, getting food from the farms—how many poultry-farmers are there in the Dominion?—About one hundred and sixty thousand.

So that we can divide that by three to find out the number who are actually making a living out of it?—There are approximately one hundred and sixty thousand householders in New Zealand keeping poultry, and of that number there are about 150 to 175 who are making their living out of it. That, I should say, is quite a high estimate of the number who are actually making their complete living from poultry-keeping. Then we have the big mass of poultry-keepers who are keeping poultry in order to supplement their living considerably—that is, in flocks ranging from seventy-five to one hundred birds. The greatest proportion of poultry in New Zealand is held on farms in flocks ranging from twelve to thirty-six birds, and that is where our big bulk production comes from.

The question then comes, if there are four million birds in New Zealand and they are getting an average of one and three-quarters of a bushel, where are the 7,000,000 bushels coming from?—I indicated that there are approximately four million birds, using approximately 2,000,000 bushels of wheat. On those farms which are really only back-yard farms, and the poultry feed on the open ranges, they would only be receiving one-third to one-half a bushel at the outside. Their greatest food is made up from scraps and from seed which is picked up from the farm.

And oats, too?—There would be a certain amount of oats used for fowl-feed, but not a great amount.

So that there are 175 people actually making their living, and the rest use wheat simply as a supplement for scraps from the household?—Yes.

The Chairman.] You said a certain number are partially making their living from poultry-keeping?—The number of people who are partially making their living runs into thousands.

Mr. Jones.] Including farmers as well?—Yes.

I gather that a reduction of 6d. a bushel in the price of wheat would mean less than $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per dozen drop in the cost of producing eggs?—Yes, it would represent less than that. The reduction would be only a shade, but it would vary according to the amount of eggs produced from the birds on the individual farms. There has been a terrific range of production on farms, owing to management, &c., and the type of birds kept.

Was the question of 1s. reduction in the price of wheat per bushel, amounting to a reduction of $1\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the cost of producing eggs, based on information supplied by an expert poultry-keeper using nothing else but bought food?—Yes, and averaging nine dozen eggs per bird. If the birds averaged twelve dozen eggs each it would mean a reduction of only 1d. per dozen.

What would be the egg-production per bird on a first-class poultry-farm?—The highest range is fourteen dozen, but very few average that. The main bulk of specialist poultry-farmers give the average from 10.5 to 11.5 dozen per bird.

What do you think would be the average on a poultry-farm controlled by a really first-class man who knew his job thoroughly?—On the figures I have, I should say if it is ten and a half to eleven dozen it is well up to the average, if not above the average.

Hon. Mr. Cobbe.] Are the poultry-farmers organized in such a way that they are able to buy their wheat advantageously, or do they make their purchases in any sort of way?—No, sir, they are not organized. That is one of the big troubles so far as poultry-farming is concerned, especially in the North Island, where the poultry-keeper buys wheat in small lots, and the cost, therefore, is mounting up all the time—storage, insurance, and so on. There are several handling charges between wholesalers and retailers, probably down to small shopkeepers, in the country districts, and the average keeper never knows what he is going to pay for wheat.