

WHEAT SITUATION IN AUSTRALIA

"According to the last report of the Australian Wheat Board there are 87,753,000 bushels of wheat stacked in Australia, of which 82,383,000 are available for export, and 5,370,000 for the millers."

The acreage, production, and yield of wheat in Australia has been declining steadily since the season 1915-16.

The reduction in area since the 1915-16 season amounted to 5,914,110 acres, or 47 per cent; during the same time the production declined 132,855,323 bushels, or 74 per cent, and the average yield 7.31 bushels per acre, or 5.1 per cent.

There are three important causes for this extraordinary, steady decline: (1) Unfavorable weather conditions; (2) labor shortage; and (3) the relative low price of wheat.

The weather conditions during the 1915-16 season were propitious for the growth of wheat, and the largest crop ever produced in the commonwealth was the result. The 1916-17 season was wet and interfered with the sowing and plowing. Nevertheless under the stimulus of patriotism, Australia's second largest crop of wheat was produced during this season, 152,420,189 bushels.

Wet weather again prevailed during the 1917-18 season, especially in the late spring. Disaster to cereal crops in some states occurred. The next season, 1918-19, brought a change and there was a drought throughout the greater part of the spring. A severe drought last year also had its effect in reducing the production of the 1919-20 crop.

Australian farmers are feeling the effects of the shortage of labor caused by the war. According to the Pastoral Review (Melbourne), "labor is still scarce and unreliable, and there is a tendency on the part of farmers not to cultivate more land than they can manage without outside help."

A conference of producers in Sydney, during the latter part of 1918, went on record as feeling that "the cause of such decrease was chiefly attributable to diminished and vanishing profit of the wheat grower."

The "relative unprofitableness of the industry" seems to be given generally in Australian periodicals as the principal reason for the decline. During 1917 it was estimated that the cost of a 15-bushel-to-the-acre crop on average land was 3s 6d. (85 cents) a bushel. At that time the producer was receiving 3s 3d. (79 cents) for his wheat. Since then the price paid the producer has been increased to 4s. 4d. (\$1.05).

The Pastoral Review states that in parts of the wheat belt a great many farmers are giving up wheat entirely. Some are turning to oats and barley, others to live stock. At present prices of wool and meat, sheep raising offers greater inducements.

With a low production, estimated at 46,210,380 bushels by the Australian Department of Agriculture or about 44,000,000 bushels by Broomhall, Australia is tending to conserve her supplies, as noted in the Market Reporter for March 20 and April 3. Overseas sales have been discontinued by the wheat board. Already Japan's contemplated purchase of 250,000 bushels of third quality wheat has been reduced to less than 100,000 bushels.

The shortage with the consequent restrictions on exports, should again open the markets of the Far East to American wheat and flour, as the Australian product has been the dominant factor in these markets for several years. Before the war the United States carried on a good trade in these commodities with the Far East, especially with Japan and Hongkong.

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