

171. From March, 1943, to March, 1944, the farming industry continued to receive assistance. While no industry during this critical period could be exempt from contributing to the increasing man-power requirements of the overseas Forces, the position in the farming industry was conserved as much as possible, and, although March, 1944, saw the estimated labour content of the industry still some 12,000 below the pre-war level, the following steps to alleviate the shortage had been taken :—

(a) Further release of selected personnel from the home-defence Forces was effected, and 4,115 men, or 20·7 per cent. of the total man-powered out of the Forces during the year, were released for farming.

(b) A campaign to build up the strength of the Women's Land Service was launched. The number in the Service in consequence rose from 954 in September, 1943, to 1,879 as at 31st March, 1944.

(c) Holiday schemes to employ University students, teachers, and school-children were organized—1,733 teachers and students were placed during the college vacation, and 767 school-children were placed.

(d) With the co-operation of the Army and the Air Force, an Army and Air Force Harvesting Scheme was organized. Of 13,240 men made available, farmers took advantage of the services of 6,915.

(e) Male workers were directed from other industries to the farming industry.

Between October, 1943, and March, 1944, 457 men were so directed.

172. By the beginning of 1944 the demand for foodstuffs and other farm products by the United Kingdom and both the American and New Zealand Forces in the Pacific became so great that it was decided to bring back those men of the Third (Pacific) Division who would volunteer for farming or other selected essential work.

173. It was estimated that 7,000 men could be absorbed by the farming industry, and plans for the return of Third Division personnel to meet this estimate proceeded accordingly. At the same time action was taken to obtain returns of actual labour requirements from farmers. The response by the farming community was slow and disappointing. Although farmers' organizations had been stressing the acuteness of the labour shortage, and despite intensive publicity, applications for these men were notified to the Department in dilatory fashion. Applications totalled only 107 as at 28th April, 1944, and this figure increased to 973 by 10th May, 1944, and 1,713 by 26th May, 1944. At this point the quota to be released from the Third Division for farm work had to be revised in the light of applications received, and reduced to 5,000. As late returns from farmers continued to come to hand the vacancies notified increased to 3,337 by 30th June, 1944, and 4,504 by 31st July, 1944. The labour needs of the farming industry as notified were fully met, and at the end of November, 1944, 4,286 of a total of 9,100 men released from the Third Division were working on farms.

174. Between March, 1944, and March, 1945, the Department assisted the farming industry in the following ways :—

(a) Releases from the Armed Forces, 6,386, or 26·2 per cent. of the total man-power releases, including Third Division personnel, were for farming.

(b) Further expansion of the Women's Land Service—*i.e.*, from 1,879 to a peak strength of 2,088 at 30th September, 1944, despite increasing shortage of female workers generally.

(c) Vocational placement of 1,169 teachers and students and 239 school-children.

(d) Placement of men made available through the Army and Air Force Harvesting Schemes—3,550 such men were availed of by farmers.

(e) Direction of male workers from other industries—1,309 to the end of March, 1945.

175. Up to the end of 1944 Armed Forces Appeal Boards had continued to postpone the military service of farm workers except in those cases where replacements were available or release from the industry could be effected without loss of production. District Man-power Officers screened mobilization lists, and appeals were lodged by the Department in respect of farm workers in those cases where the farmers had omitted to appeal and it was considered wise to have Appeal Boards investigate the desirability or otherwise of holding the men in the industry. At the commencement of 1945, however, in order to maintain the Division in the Middle East and at the same time continue the replacement scheme whereby long-service personnel were returned to New