

The purchases under the scheme are made by the New Zealand Government on behalf of the Imperial Government, and the funds are requisitioned from London as required.

Early in March the Imperial Government entered into an agreement with the various shipping interests with the view of requisitioning the insulated space of all steamers in the Australian and New Zealand trade. This provided for the establishment in London, Australia, and New Zealand of committees of representatives of the overseas shipping companies to control the tonnage-supply.

The Imperial Meat-supply Branch, in addition to attending to all matters connected with the purchase of meat on behalf of His Majesty's Government, has from time to time supplied the Overseas Shipowners' Committee with valuable statistical information, which has much facilitated the allotment of space.

During the period 1st October, 1914, to 31st March, 1915, forty insulated steamers left the Dominion, carrying the equivalent of 2,669,281 freight carcasses, as against 2,404,189 freight carcasses during the corresponding period of the previous season.

WHEAT AND FLOUR.

The statistics available of the production of wheat over a series of years, and the absence of reliable information respecting the "carry over" from one harvest to another, made it impossible to say definitely whether the wheat obtained from the harvest of 1914 and held in the Dominion immediately subsequent to the outbreak of hostilities in Europe would be sufficient to meet the requirements of the community until the harvest of 1915 was gathered. For this reason the Government purchased in New South Wales some 45,000 bushels of wheat on favourable terms.

To determine the exact position a special census of the wheat held by farmers, millers, merchants, and others was taken on the 18th November last, and disclosed the fact that the stocks of wheat on hand at that date, even if distributed in the most favourable manner possible throughout the whole of the Dominion, would be exhausted in from three to six weeks before the new harvest of wheat would be available. With a view of relieving the position the export of wheat and flour was prohibited, and the import duty on flour remitted, while the consent of the Commonwealth Government was obtained to the exportation of flour purchased by New Zealand merchants prior to the date of the Proclamation prohibiting its export from Australia. Negotiations were opened through His Excellency the Governor with His Excellency the Viceroy of India with a view to securing a supply of Indian wheat, but the expert advice obtained showed that suitable machinery for dealing with wheat of this character was not available in New Zealand, and the negotiations were abandoned.

Arrangements were made for the importation of supplies of Canadian and Australian wheat totalling 505,800 bushels, 405,800 bushels having been purchased through the kind offices of the Canadian Government and 100,000 bushels from New South Wales. Had the latter parcel not been imported the position on the 31st January would have been most serious, as on that date only some 32,238 bushels of the 1914 season's wheat remained on hand.

The conditions of the purchase of 100,000 bushels from New South Wales require that an equivalent quantity shall be returned on demand.

The allocation of the wheat imported was dealt with by a committee specially appointed for the purpose.

In addition to meeting the shortage, the importations were of special value in enabling the new season's wheat as it came into store being utilized for milling purposes to better advantage.

To afford relief to bakers and others, and more particularly those situated outside of the principal grain-growing districts, 810 tons of flour were purchased and distributed.

Returns of the area of wheat under cultivation, and the estimates received of the probable yield, indicated that a further shortage was likely to result during the present year, and an option over 1,000,000 bushels of Canadian wheat was obtained. Further, steps were taken to obtain accurate information as to the wheat-yield of the 1915 harvest by securing monthly returns from threshing-mill owners. These returns show that the yield amounts to 6,250,000 bushels (approximately), which will be insufficient to provide all requirements until the harvest of 1916 is available.