

four or five years, and the Government ought to make these people grow wheat or take the land from them. If Australia had a big season and we had a bad one I would be satisfied to accept their prices. If the Government will only give inducement to the farmers to grow wheat there will be no need to import wheat from Australia.

To the Chairman: The promise of a free market was made by the Hon. Mr. MacDonald on the Oamaru showground. I am only going by what appeared in the newspapers. It was understood by the farmers in North Otago that the price would be 6s. 6d. and an open market. As a result of the Minister's promise hundreds of acres were put under wheat. The promise was made on the day of the ram fair last March. We got 5s. 10d. for our wheat last year.

To Mr. Hudson: I would be satisfied to grow at the Australian price. If the price of imported wheat dropped next year to 6s. I would accept it year in and year out. I would be satisfied if the embargo were taken off and we were given a free market. It means now that there will be little wheat grown next year, owing to the cost of production.

To Mr. Craigie: It would stimulate wheat-growing if the price was fixed for three years at 6s. 6d. If meat falls in price I do not think there will be a rush to put in wheat. It is paying us better to-day to have ewes and lambs than to grow wheat. With the labour difficulties, I do not blame the small farmer who takes up the line that pays best. If the large farmer does not grow wheat the Government would be doing right in commandeering his land and making the best use of it. I am of opinion that the duty we have to pay in Australia should also be imposed in New Zealand.

To the Chairman: I believe that wheat cannot be produced at less than 7s. per bushel to-day.

To Mr. Craigie: You cannot sell land to-day as well as you could two or three years ago. The labour question is one difficulty.

To the Chairman: The price of 6s. 6d. per bushel was agreed on six weeks ago, after the crop was nearly finished. A straight-out price fixed for, say, three years would be a satisfactory way of getting over any difficulty. I say that the price ought to be 7s., and nothing less. With that price I would not object to a farmer being compelled to grow a certain amount of wheat.

L. H. ORBELL, Farmer, examined.

I am present as one who has taken a considerable interest in wheat-growing for a number of years, and as one who has been actively engaged in the industry. After what Mr. Gardiner has said it is hardly necessary to state that the industry has lapsed into a very languishing condition at the present day. To my mind the cause of it to a great extent is, to put it in two words, foreign invasion. I have advocated a reciprocal tariff between New Zealand and Australia, because the present tariff does not encourage the New Zealand farmer to grow the wheat that is necessary in this country. If a reciprocal tariff is not enough let it be a prohibitive tariff, and leave the rest to supply and demand. There is no sentiment about wheat-growing. For some years the farmers have been growing wheat at a loss. I exclude this year, because it is above the average. The crop is not saved yet, but, assuming that it may be saved, it is much above the average year. The area sown in the Dominion is 223,750 acres, which the Government expect to yield 28 bushels to the acre—a high return—which will yield 6,265,000 bushels. I estimate New Zealand's requirements at 7,000,000 bushels, allowing for a safe carry-over. I wish to say, with all due deference to the Minister of Agriculture, that so long as the powers that be make a North Island man Minister of Agriculture, the wheat-growing industry will never be on a satisfactory footing. I am aware that Mr. MacDonald is a farmer, but North Island farmers do not know wheat-growing as we do here. If we are going to have wheat and flour dumped into New Zealand from Australia the industry will be gone, because farmers will not grow wheat in competition with Australia without adequate protection from the Government. The previous witness said he would take the Australian price as a standard, but I do not altogether agree with him. If we are going to be dependent upon Australia for wheat or flour the time will come when Australia will have the market and we shall have none, because we have gone out of the industry, for the simple reason that we have had no encouragement to continue in it. If all our wheat and flour has to be grown in Australia it will put a great number of our labourers out of an employment which they look for every year. Then we have no experimental farm in the South Island, and we ought to have one. The North Island cannot be compared with the South Island in the matter of agricultural land.

To Mr. Craigie: If the Government must control the wheat then I say, "Offer a price for three years ahead, and let us know where we are." Mr. Gardiner suggested 7s. as the price. I think it is a high price, but it would induce farmers to grow wheat. This district has not benefited by the high prices of the last few years. The Government should have a clear-cut policy and give the people time to get their land prepared. The price should be fixed in January for the following year, or perhaps in December. I think the Hon. Mr. MacDonald has the best of intentions towards the farmers, and it may be that he was overruled in Cabinet. I suggest that a Canterbury man should be the Minister of Agriculture. I do not contemplate New Zealand being an exporter of wheat. Every article from the time the plough is put in the ground until the grain is in the mill has gone up enormously. Speaking as a citizen, I think it is national policy for this country to grow as much wheat as will keep it. There might be a drought in Australia, or shipping or other troubles, and we would have to import from Canada or the States. And if we are to import from Australia, where are our bran and pollard to come from? I do not believe in compelling a farmer to grow this or that. Personally, I am not much bothered with the labour difficulty.

To Mr. Hudson: When I speak of a prohibitive tariff I believe that a reciprocal tariff might be sufficient. If the reciprocal would not, then I would make the tariff such that the wheat