

During the year under review the potentialities of chilled beef as a more efficient medium of converting our feed into a product more readily saleable on the overseas markets have been further examined. There is some evidence of successful development relative to the corresponding stage a year ago when the Dominion's chilled-beef trade was largely in its experimental stage; in the meantime overseas exports have increased to 52,987 quarters for the ten months ending 31st July, 1935, from 17,958 quarters for the corresponding period of the previous season. While the substantial increase is gratifying, it is improbable that it is completely indicative of future considerable expansion in the trade, although this may quite well occur provided the producers give sufficient study and attention to the type of beasts required and arrange to bring them to export condition at a suitable age—*i.e.*, in the vicinity of three years or less. Favourable reports have been received regarding the quality and the dressing of the shipments already made, and the high standard of much of the grassland of the Dominion greatly favours the production of beef of high quality. A vital question to which there is as yet no definite answer is whether the future prices obtainable will give the necessary economic inducement to stimulate a considerable supply of chilled beef of the requisite quality. By their actions in respect to equipment a number of companies, both shipping and freezing, seem to indicate an expectation that future prices will justify expansion, and their enterprise is most commendable. Interest attaches to small shipments of chilled beef that are being made to Honolulu.

There is gratifying evidence that sheep-farmers continue to consolidate their position. An illustration of this is provided in the interim official statistics of live-stock for the 1934–35 season. These disclose that despite a record killing of lambs for export there has been a substantial increase in the flocks in the Dominion at 30th April, 1935, which are estimated to number 29,078,678, whereas the final number for the corresponding previous period was 28,649,038. The number of sheep in the Dominion at 30th April, 1935, is the second highest ever recorded, being approximately one million below the highest recorded—30,841,287, in 1930—and represents a second consecutive increase since 1933, when the reduced flocks totalled 27,755,966. A further noteworthy fact is that the estimated increase in breeding-ewes accounts for more than half of the total increase in the 1935 flocks. This is to be accounted for largely by the fact that the estimated number of 1934 lambs exceeded that of any previous year. It is probable that strengthening of the sheep-farming position also is being brought about by increased use of fertilizers on grassland; although exact evidence on this point is not available, reports regarding fertilizer sales point to increased top-dressing by sheep-farmers.

A welcome fact is that the latest available data are indicative of a general upward trend in the acreage devoted to crops grown specially for feed to be used when that directly available from grassland is likely to be below economic requirements. Increased acreages are recorded in respect to cereals and other crops yielding green fodder, turnips, rape, mangels, carrots, and lucerne. Against this, however, is to be set a decline in the area, which previously was undesirably low, devoted to hay and silage. The decrease in the area devoted to hay was substantially greater than in that devoted to silage. It is considered that neither decrease was due to a decrease in the value popularly attached to these feeds, but that both decreases were due partly to seasonal conditions and partly to the joint influence of restricted top-dressing programmes over a series of seasons and increases in the number of stock, resulting in a smaller surplus of summer growth of grassland being available for ensilage or haymaking. Any trend towards less hay and silage, if not associated with a greater total provision in other ways of reserves of special feed, would be definitely regrettable: a real step towards more economic farming would be the better adjustment of seasonal feed-supplies to seasonal feed requirements by means of suitable special provision of feed for use in periods of scant supplies from pastures.

For the second year in succession the sales of lucerne cultures by the Department have been sufficient to treat the seed required for the sowing of approximately 6,000 acres. The annual sowings of lucerne do not represent a net increase in the Dominion effective acreage: they are offset by the portion of previously established lucerne which each year goes out of production on account of its age, &c.; but the official statistics show that when allowance is made for this there is a steady increase in the Dominion acreage of lucerne. While this increase is not as great as the merits of lucerne would justify, it is probable it will be greater in the immediate future. This is partly because the recent dry summer has provided many striking demonstrations of the outstanding value of lucerne when dry conditions are experienced, and, judging by the number of inquiries received, has greatly increased the popular interest in the inherent value of lucerne under a wide set of circumstances in which lucerne is not at all freely utilized to-day.