

THE ARMY GOES HARVESTING

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EVERY YEAR something like 405,000 acres of grain and pulse crops are grown in New Zealand for threshing. Most of it—98 per cent. of wheat, 99 per cent. of oats, and 97 per cent. of barley—comes from the South Island; more than half of the total from Canterbury alone. In the past, to gather and thresh this grain, farmers have relied largely on casual labour.

To-day casual labour hardly exists, so Army agreed to supply the extra hands required. Demobilized home servicemen under twenty years of age and some men from the reinforcement pool were encamped about the country for short periods.

Wheat, oats, barley, peas, potatoes, tomatoes, flax, have all been gathered by soldiers. Grain-stores, threshing-mills and flour-mills have also had help. Everywhere tribute is paid to the men's work. It is commonly agreed that "We simply could not have done without them".

Army harvesting is an interesting experiment in labour. It has *organized* casual work. Primary Production Councils estimated labour required in their localities. Small pools of men were put in camp at suitable places. The camp is on the phone, and farmers ring up when they want assistance. In the orderly room is a large board slotted like a sports club "ladder." Men's tickets are put under employers' names as required. If the local telephone exchange is open twenty-four hours a day, you may get a call (or a cancellation) at any time. And whether it be a "call" or a snub, praise or blame (like most of us, farmers love a grouch), you must answer it with courtesy and readiness. For in this game, too, politeness oils the wheels.

Word gets about in a flash, particularly if it's a bad word. Farmer A finds one of the men sent to him especially good. That evening Farmers B, C, and D will all ask for the same man. Soon an employer is trying to get a group of three or four good men! But the O.C., trying to give every farmer a fair deal, must mix as evenly as he can the sheep and goats.

By 0730 breakfast is over, tents laid out and respective parties ready to leave. Before 0800 hrs. the farmers have their men. Sometimes the O.C. and the Sergeant-Major are out, too. Camp must have at least a Quartermaster, Orderly Room Clerk, R.A.P., Cook, and fatigue. You know the usual round—ablutions, latrines, cookhouse, tent-lines, &c.

Midday dry rations are given each party. These are helped out or not (according to taste or temperament) by employers.

Time-sheets are kept and signed daily by employers. The men get Army pay plus sixpence an hour. If they work more than eight hours a day or after 5 p.m. they get 2s. 6d. an hour overtime. The farmer pays 2s. 6d. an hour to Army for labour during working-hours.

As most of the men engaged are of the under-age-for-overseas-service group doing part of their annual compulsory training, the job is popular enough, and yet not all claim this harvesting scheme a success.

What are the pros and cons?

Against: Unskilled labour. Men sometimes too young; not tough enough.

For: Men on tap when, where, and in numbers required.

Little or no meals for employer to supply.

No accommodation for employers to supply.

No work, no pay (farm employer's viewpoint).

Men housed in healthy clean surroundings with a regular routine.

Recreation and entertainment organized.

Men usefully employed on wet days or when not required by farmers—*i.e.*, in military training.

Broadening experience for many clerks, factory, and other city workers.

Healthy change of occupation.

May foster understanding between city and country and even win some converts to farming—

The "Ayes" Have It.