

BACON IN TWO WARS

A comparison of Canada's bacon export trade with the United Kingdom during World War I and the present war shows several developments. In the years 1914 to 1918, inclusive, Canada shipped to the United Kingdom a total of some 720,000,000 pounds of bacon and hams, which reached a peak of 217,000,000 pounds in 1917. However, during 1917 alone, 130,000,000 pounds of pork were imported into Canada from the United States, part of which was cured and re-exported, with the remainder consumed domestically. Thus during the 1914-18 period bacon exports exceeded imports of pork by only 43,000,000 pounds, a great deal less than the 600,000,000 shipped during the third year of this war or the contract for 675,000,000 pounds undertaken in the fourth year of the war. Except for a brief period early in 1940, wartime imports of pork from the United States have been insignificant.

In World War I there was no specific agency established to superintend the delivery of export bacon overseas. Moreover, although considerable pioneer work had already laid the foundations for future progress, Canadian swine producers in general had not begun to concentrate efforts towards the development of a true bacon-type hog. As a result, the quality of the product supplied to the United Kingdom during that period was not conducive to the building up of Canadian bacon trade after the war. In the years from 1919 to 1925 exports ranged around 100,000,000 pounds annually, after which quantities going forward declined progressively until 1931, when the total has shrunk to only 11,000,000 pounds. In the meantime, however, swine grading had been established and other policies instituted which were designed to improve the hog and bacon industry.

After the Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa in 1932, Canada received the benefit of what then appeared to be a substantial quota in the British market. As a result of this stimulus bacon shipments from 1932 onwards showed some increase, although not at any time did they reach the maximum of 280,000,000 pounds permitted under the Empire trade agreements. The drought which affected large grain-growing areas of western Canada no doubt was a limiting factor. However, the greater stability of hog markets after 1935, culminating in 1938 in the highest prices since the beginning of the depression, led to a sharp upswing in production manifest in a record 1939 spring pig crop. When Canada declared war in September, 1939, this crop was nearly ready for market, and during the fall of 1939 new marketing records were established.

CATTLE

With greater numbers of cattle on Canadian farms and ranches, the 1944 objective calls for an increase in marketings of cattle. A 6% increase in cattle and a 3% increase in veal calves in relation to 1943 output figures is expected. It has also been recommended that cattle continue to be marketed at the comparatively heavy average weights maintained in recent months. Although the feed situation is somewhat less favorable than a year ago, the trend is now toward the marketing of older, and consequently heavier, cattle.

Storage stocks of beef at December, 1943, were comparatively high, particularly with respect to boneless beef. The total beef reported in cold storage was 30,300,000 pounds, compared with 28,000,000 pounds at the same date the year before and an average of 26,800,000 pounds for the four years 1938 to 1941. Holdings of boneless beef at more than 8,000,000 pounds were the greatest on recent record at this date.

A further sharp increase in the number of cattle on farms was reported at December 1, 1942. The 1942 figure of 8,833,700 head represented an increase of 7.1% over the numbers on hand at the same date on 1941. The major part of the increase was in young stock and beef cattle rather than milk cows. Much of the increase was due to the tendency on the part of farmers to hold back young cattle for further feeding and restocking.

SHEEP

At December 1, 1942, the number of sheep on farms totalled 2,482,700, an increase of 10.1% over the corresponding date in 1941. A large proportion was breeding stock, and it was expected that further increases would result in 1943.