

WHAT EUROPEAN FOOD MINISTERS SAY.

The Italian Food Minister made the following statement in the Chamber:—

"The imports of grain for 1918-19 amount to 27 million quintals. At the meeting in June of the Food Ministers of the United States of America, Great Britain, France and Italy, it was recognized that the requirements of imported foodstuffs in Italy amounted to 42 million quintals, of which 34 million quintals were cereals, and at the following meetings in August of the Inter-Allied Shipping Transport Council, Italy given priority for the transport of about 38 million tons of foodstuffs. The imports of cereals from Sept. 1 to Dec. 31 amount to about 1 million tons, as against 508,000 tons during the same period in 1917; oats 200,000 tons, as against 168,000 tons in 1917; frozen meat 75,000 tons as against 32,000 tons; meat substitutes 28,000 tons, as against 5,000; condensed milk 8,000 tons, as against 430 tons. The Ministry is to import fats and sugar, in a quantity corresponding to the total of private imports, amounting to about 15,000 tons of each. The last harvest was a good one, but unfortunately the 1919 harvest does not promise to come up to the previous one. Our requirements have increased, for many reasons. Although the wheat harvest was a good one, other harvests have not come up to expectations, such as maize, chestnuts, potatoes, etc. Also our victory has brought us an increased population totally unprovided with foodstuffs.

"The provisioning of the new territories and of our prisoners requires an increase in imports of about 1,300,000 tons per month, which means an increase of our total imports by 40 per cent. The economy of tonnage and of finance which the cessation of hostilities would have permitted will be nullified by the necessity of increasing our imports, as mentioned above.

"Prices are already showing signs of falling in some parts of Italy, and there is no doubt that they will continue to do so.

"The internal food policy of the country for 1919 will depend on the outcome of the forthcoming international conferences. Italy, however, must be able to count on larger imports than France. The superficial area of France is nearly double that of Italy, with about the same population. The cultivable area of France is about 24 million hectares, against 13,685,000 hectares in Italy. The area under cereal cultivation is 14 million hectares, against 7 million in Italy. France has 12 million head of cattle, against 6 million in Italy. It will be necessary for some time to come to exercise the strictest economy in the consumption of foodstuffs."

The following communication from Wurm, the State Secretary of the German War Food Board, appears in most of the papers:

"The foreign Press has evinced much surprise that Germany should now be on the verge of famine, considering that the former Government declared that the food supply was safe until the end of this economic year. The food situation in Germany has been depicted much too favourably, and, moreover, about 1,500,000 men and 300,000 horses were provided for in the Eastern occupied territories. Considerable imports of grain and fodder were expected from the Ukraine, the Don, and Kuban districts, while it was hoped to procure large quantities of oil-seeds and oil via the sea and the Danube. Now, with one blow, all these expectations are shattered, and, in addition, the harvests at home have proved smaller than originally expected, particularly the potato crop. Recent military events made heavy demands on our rolling stock, thereby retarding deliveries of potatoes to the big industrial centres. As soon as the armistice was signed nearly all prisoners of war, on whose labour German agriculture was practically dependent, ceased work immediately. Millions of hundred-weights of potatoes remained, therefore, unlifted, and have been damaged by the early frost. The home cattle stocks show a monthly decrease in slaughter cattle and other animal products.

This shortage is accentuated by the forced surrender of transport, which makes congestion of traffic inevitable between storehouses, mills, food factories, distribution offices, and communal unions, and further by the fact that in many places the local authorities have ignored the rights of the general public, so that important stores have been consumed prematurely and contrary to plan.

"All these conditions have brought about such a state of affairs that only the speediest import of foreign foodstuffs can save the German people from famine, even if the agricultural population, realizing the seriousness of the situation, is ready to deliver up all possible field crops and to comply strictly with the war economic measures. Although the central administrative machinery continues to function undisturbed, yet the shortage of food and transport makes a collapse almost inevitable unless the great deficit in supply of the principal towns can be so covered by the promised American help and the friendliness of neutrals that foreign imports will adequately supplement home reserves."