

The Grain Growers' Guide

Winnipeg, Wednesday, September 22nd, 1915

THE WHEAT SITUATION

Aside from the war the biggest national problem in Canada today is the marketing of the wheat crop. The total crop is larger than in any previous year. The world demand for wheat would entitle the farmers to a very profitable price. But, instead, the price has steadily gone down as the shipping season has approached. The foreign consumer is paying a big price, but the extortionate profits being taken between the farmer and the consumer are robbing both of their just rights. Here and there some one pops up with a proposal that the Dominion or British government should buy the crop at a guaranteed price higher than the market price. There is neither sense nor reason in such a proposition. There is no reason why the British government should not buy the food for its soldiers at the lowest market price. There would be no sense in the Dominion government buying the crop at more than the market price and then unloading the losses on the taxpayers in general. The western farmers are not asking for any special privileges. They only ask for a square deal and no favors, and if they could but get even this they would be prosperous. This is the first in many years that the western farmers have had a prospect of dollar wheat or more, to which they are fully entitled by the world demand.

There are several causes for the low price of wheat. One is the condition of Sterling exchange, which is costing our farmers several cents on every bushel. This situation can only be corrected by the action of the British government, and as it is costing Britain enormous losses it will be rectified rapidly. In fact, the British financiers are already in New York arranging a gigantic loan, which will bring Sterling exchange back to normal. Another factor in depressing prices is the boosting of the crop by ridiculously high estimates. This is a regular business with a number of interests who have something to gain from speculation and can, and will, be corrected in time. The biggest factor is the shortage of ocean freight boats and high freight charges. The owners of freight boats know there is a shortage and have consequently done as all monopolies do, namely, put the charges as "high as the traffic will bear." Before the war they carried wheat across the Atlantic at 8 and 10 cents a bushel and made big money at those prices. Now they are charging 28 and 30 cents a bushel. These patriotic gentlemen are using the war conditions to plunder the public shamefully. The freight situation can and should be remedied.

The Dominion government has certainly been very lax in its efforts to help the farmers in this hour of need. Last spring the Dominion government paid several agricultural experts to put on a "Patriotism and Production" campaign in the West, urging the farmers to produce a big crop. The farmers responded nobly and produced a wonderful crop. The Dominion government is now permitting the farmers to be plundered of the greater part of the profits from that crop. Sir Robert Borden announced on his return from Britain a little while ago that he had made arrangements for transporting the wheat.

But no one knows what he has done, and certainly he has not helped wheat prices one iota. There will be upwards of 150,000,000 bushels of our crop for export. The loss of 20 cents per bushel on this crop means a loss of \$30,000,000 to the farmers. They cannot afford the loss. It was thru Sir Robert Borden's efforts, aided by the privileged interests, that our farmers were denied entrance to the American market when it was of value. Today it is by the lack of effort on the part of Premier Borden and his government that our farmers are being robbed on the way to the British market. If it were the manufacturers who were suffering from adverse conditions Sir Robert would rush to their rescue at once by passing a law, as he did a year ago, compelling everyone to pay a higher price for manufactured goods. If it were the railway magnates Sir Robert would come to their rescue by giving them a free gift from the public treasury, and a huge loan that may never be returned, as he did with the C.N.R. and G.T.P. If it were the bankers he would help them as he did two years ago, by passing a law giving them a monopoly and allowing them to fix interest charges to suit themselves. But it is only the farmers who have no campaign fund to provide and who have no influence in government circles. Sir Robert and his colleagues will shed crocodile tears in public over the losses of the farmers, but they will do nothing to help them. It is becoming more and more apparent that our federal government is largely a department of the privileged interests, and operated by those interests. The farmers will never get a square deal in transportation until they own and operate their own fleet of boats, not only on the ocean but on the Great Lakes as well. In the meantime we would strongly advise farmers holding a portion of their wheat to avoid glutting the market.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE FOR ALBERTA

The women of Alberta have been promised political equality and will be given the franchise at the next session of the provincial legislature. This promise is contained in a letter from Premier Sifton received a few days ago by James Speakman, president of the United Farmers of Alberta, and forwarded to The Guide by Mr. Speakman. It is as follows:

James Speakman, Esq.,

President United Farmers of Alberta:

Dear Sir:—Your letter in regard to Woman Suffrage received. This matter has received the serious consideration of the government and I have given instructions for the preparation of a statute placing men and women in Alberta on a basis of absolute equality so far as provincial matters are concerned. This bill will be presented at the next meeting of the legislature as a government measure.

Yours very truly,

A. L. SIFTON.

From the use of the words "absolute equality" it is evident that Premier Sifton intends that women should be made eligible to become members of the legislature and of the government as well as to vote at provincial elections. And why should they not? The Legislature will probably meet in November, so that the Manitoba government, which is also pledged to give votes to women will need to hurry if Alberta is not to have the honor of being the first province in

Canada to confer the rights of citizenship upon its women.

THE SEED GRAIN ADVANCE

It is doubtful if any government document has ever aroused more indignation or brought forth more protest in the West than the circular sent out by the Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior notifying those who received seed grain or other advances that the amount due by them to the government would be collected from the proceeds of the first grain marketed by them. Arrangements were made by the government with the grain purchasing interests and railway companies to do the collecting, so that no money should be received by the farmers for their crop until the claim of the government had been settled in full, with interest. This would mean that the government must be paid before twine, gasoline, or food could be bought, or threshing bills or wages paid, and in many cases would make it impossible to thresh the crop. Considering the fact that the farmers were charged exorbitant prices for the seed, that much of it was badly polluted with weeds and that it was, according to the letters of the department, to be paid for on or before January 1, 1916, this was certainly a pretty high-handed proceeding on the part of the government. Its effect was to tie up threshing in many places, stop credit at country stores, and bring confusion into business thruout the West. If persisted in it would have caused many of those who could get their grain threshed to rush it on the market at once and so help to depress prices at a time when slow marketing is particularly necessary. Fortunately, however, the protests of farmers and business men have been effective in bringing about a modification of the government's decision to get its pound of flesh without delay, and J. Bruce Walker, immigration commissioner, has handed out the following statement on the matter:

"The minister has decided to ask for payment this year of one-half only of the seed grain advances, together with interest. Where both relief, fodder and seed grain were advanced payment will be asked for one-half of the seed grain advanced only; where relief only was provided, one-half only of the amount advanced for such relief will be asked for."

This whole affair of seed grain distribution appears to have been a bungle from start to finish. According to complaints which have been made, it appears that in the beginning grain was bought at prices above the market value from supporters of the Dominion government, while it was refused at lower figures from those of the opposite political party; that many farmers were promised seed or feed grain and then not supplied; that much of the seed was impure and introduced wild oats and other noxious weeds into districts where these pests were previously unknown, and that the prices charged were in some places considerably higher than better seed could have been secured for locally. If these charges are true the full facts should be made known and the responsibility brought home to the officials who are to blame. We have a suspicion that it will be necessary to go back to Ottawa to find those really responsible, for no one who knew the West could make such a mess of the whole affair except by criminal inefficiency. We