

Crop Prospects in the West

Spring Work on Farms Greatly Retarded by Weather — Late Sowing has not always meant Poor Crops — The Labor Situation.

By E. CORA HIND.

Winnipeg, April 29.—Weather conditions in the west have not materially improved in the past week, excepting that intermittent rains during the last three days have helped, to some extent, in clearing off the snow in Saskatchewan and Alberta, where the snow falls were very heavy round the 15th and 17th.

The province of Saskatchewan has issued its first bulletin on conditions on the land, and this shows an estimated decrease of from 20 to 25 per cent on wheat acreage. They further estimate that with fine weather seeding may be general in that province in 15 days, and some places expect to be in a position to start about May 1st. Reports with regard to Alberta are less definite. In Manitoba seeding and ploughing are going on in a very few districts, not owing so much to the snow, but to the fact that the recent rains have made the land too wet to work. Of course, there is a very considerable amount of snow in places in Manitoba even yet, more especially in the extreme north of the province and between the lakes, Manitoba and Winnipeg.

The Minister of Agriculture in a report stated that the acreage in Manitoba will be reduced from 10 to 15 per cent. This reduction will be due in part to the small amount of fall plowing accomplished last season and in part to the shortage of feed which will prevent horses from being worked as hard as they should be in order to get the crop in, in the short time left for seeding. The dairy commissioner estimates that there will be a reduction in butter production of some 25 per cent from the same cause.

The department of agriculture for Manitoba has also issued a very interesting report giving the dates at which seeding was general in the province for the past 25 years, namely, from 1919 back to 1895. Only three times during that period, namely 1896, 1899 and 1907, was wheat seeding delayed until May. In 1896 seeding was not general until May 5th. The average yield for that year was 14.33 bushels, and there was a very wet season. In 1899 seeding was not general until May 8th, and the average yield for that year was 17.13. The character of the season is not indicated for that year. The next very late season was 1907, when wheat seeding was general on May 8th and the acreage yield that year was 14.22. The comment is, "an extremely late spring and many crops frozen following fall." In twelve years out of twenty-five wheat seeding was general in Manitoba between the 8th and 15th of April, and in ten years seeding was general between the 18th and the 25th of April. In the years when seeding was general about the 8th of April, the yields were as follows: 1895, 27.86 bushels; 1918, 16.5; 1903, 16.42, while in 1900 when seeding was general on the 8th of April the crop was the nearest to a failure of any year since 1888, the early seeding being followed by an extremely hot, dry June and the yield was only 8.9 bushels. In 1915, the year of the biggest crop that the west has ever produced seeding was general in the province of Manitoba on April 12th, the yield that year averaging 26.4. In 1901 when seeding was general on April 20, the yield was 25.1. In 1905 seeding was general on 12th of April, but it had been in progress from the 27th of March and the yield that year was 21.07.

These figures are interesting in that they in-

dicate that a late spring is not necessarily a ruined crop. There is no possibility now that seeding can be at all general, even in Manitoba, before the first of May.

While seeding and crop prospects are far from rosy at the present time there is a general feeling of great satisfaction that the west has had a through wetting down from the great lakes to the Rockies and with a warm May and seasonable June rainfall the crop from a reduced acreage may be actually larger than it has been from the larger acreages of the past few years. So far as western wheat farmers are concerned it is a case of "Are we discouraged? certainly not."

Planting of Durum Wheat.

In Saskatchewan, particularly those areas that suffered from drought in the past two years, there has been considerable inquiry as to the advisability of planting Durum wheat rather than Marquis and Fife, and the Dominion Seed branch has arranged to buy between 3,000 and 4,000 bushels of Durum and distribute it through the Dominion seed purchasing commission.

A number of farmers have applied for this seed and the university of Saskatchewan, through its field husbandry branch is supplying a very excellent bulletin on the desirable and undesirable qualities and characteristics of Durum wheat. Some of the drier sections of Manitoba has been interested in this wheat also, and during the February farm meetings the Provincial Government brought in an expert from Dakota to speak on this wheat. His advice to Manitoba was to go slow in the matter, as while it had proved very successful in dry parts of the United States and was unquestionably fairly rust resisting, the position of the western country of Canada with regard to wheat is very different to that of the United States, where they never have more than 20 per cent of their crop for export, and often not that much, whereas western Canada never consumes more than 20 per cent of what is produced and must export the balance, and that her export trade had been established on the reputation of hard spring wheat.

The Feed Situation.

The feed situation with regard to livestock is still very critical, though every possible effort has been made to relieve it. Some of the boards of trade and other interested in stimulating immigration are trying to minimize the statement already published with regard to the shortage of feed and the losses in cattle. This is a foolish thing to do and it is difficult to see what advantage they think they will accrue to the country from it. The Canadian west is no worse off than many of the states of the south, in fact the recent blizzards and tornadoes in many of the states have done more damage and occasioned more loss than anything that has happened in the west. The country here is big enough and strong enough to recover from any temporary set back, such as the drought of last year and the resulting shortage of feed. In fact, while the present conditions is very grievous, it is not on unmixed evil, as it has called attention to the need for providing fodder for stock instead of concentrating all energy on producing wheat. It has also laid emphasis on another matter, namely that larger reserves of feed should be kept from year to year to provide against a possible recurrence of dry years. Manitoba has suffered very material loss

from the fact that she allowed herself to be persuaded to sell feed further west, and the long continued feeding period has made it necessary for districts like the Swan River valley to buy feed. In the famous Swan River Valley there were thousands of tons of hay put up last year and shipped out by haying outfits from Saskatchewan and Alberta. This is something that will not be allowed to happen again. There was a very natural desire on the part of Manitoba to give up some of her abundance to the needy provinces further west, but care must be exercised in future not to be over-generous.

The supply of bran and shorts has been increased materially during the past week, the advance in prices having increased the milling output and there is more of these feeds available than there was ten days ago.

Farm Labor in Demand.

The farm labor situation is peculiar at the present time, as delayed selling has made farmers shy of actually engaging help at the high wages asked and now the demand for farm help is very heavy. For the week ending April 17th the Government Employment Bureau at Winnipeg found positions for 1408 people, 1254 men and 154 women. There were 834 applications for men unplaced, and 1410 vacancies for men unfilled.

The demand for women help in farm homes is also very keen. Farm women are offering from \$35 to \$40 a month for help and at the close of the week referred to there were still 842 applications for this class of help which it had been impossible to fill.

Union Labor Controversy.

The week in Winnipeg has been marked by a controversy between the street railway company and its employees with regard to an increase in wages, which had it been acceded to, would have run into something like one million and a half dollars a year. The street railway has taken the stand that the wages asked were "too extreme to be even considered." For a day when the relationship was very strained, it being rumored that the street railway men who have separated themselves from the International and are independent here, were likely to take drastic action. However, better council must have prevailed and the railway has stated its willingness to lay the matter before a board of conciliation under the Lemieux act or before the joint council of industry created under the Manitoba Industrial Disputes Act.

There is a very great feeling of unrest in union labor circles in Winnipeg, but whether it portends anything like a general strike this spring, it is not possible to say. There is undoubtedly a good deal of apprehension along these lines, and it is possible that the present decision to abandon the idea of a great pageant to celebrate Manitoba's jubilee as a province, may have been, to some extent, influenced by the fear of labor disturbances.

Regina, Sask., reports, however, that labor conditions are more reassuring than a year ago when a general strike in the building trade was on at this time. They report that this year all the building trades have signed agreements at an advance over last year, with the exception of the carpenters whose agreement does not expire till May 1. They are asking for a closed shop and \$1 an hour and the contractors object to the closed shop principle.

Calgary reports no strikes in sight. Three agreements expire June 1 and four on July 1. Plasterer's laborers on June 1 will ask for 75 cents an hour and sheet metal workers \$1 an hour. An individual who is close in and well posted writes from Vancouver stating that the possibility of strikes is not great as the people who struck last year have not recovered sufficiently financially to attempt anything like a general strike this spring.