

DEFENSE WORK DRAINING LABOR FROM FARMERS

Construction at High
Pay Enticing to Men
While Crops Suffer.

SITUATION ACUTE

New national defense construction work on flying fields and training centres late this week opened a further drain upon the already slim farm labor resources. Labor and Agriculture Department officials yesterday reported to Premier Hepburn, Acting Minister of Agriculture, and Hon. N. O. Hipel, Minister of Labor.

The farm help situation, both Ministers said, was far more acute now than two weeks ago when the Cabinet first adopted its policy of enlisting student help to meet the emergency.

In the original farm labor surveys submitted to the Cabinet at that time, members were advised that enlistment from the farms, plus a movement of farm hands to higher paying war industry jobs were the chief contributing factors to the emergency.

On top of that, national defense construction at Camp Borden and at Petawawa had drawn heavily upon labor in Simcoe and Renfrew Counties. Two weeks ago, Simcoe County had 400 farmers' applications for help unfilled.

Refuse Farm Jobs.

On Tuesday, said the Minister of Labor, 1,000 men lined up before the Kitchener employment office seeking work on a training project, paying 75 cents an hour. "At the same time a farmer came along, desperately in need of help, and couldn't get one man to go to a farm," said Mr. Hipel. "Of the 1,000 applicants, 325, including a large group of war veterans, were hired."

The Kitchener illustration was described as a "definite case in point of what is happening." Besides Kitchener, defense work has been ordered at Brockville, Cornwall, Peterborough, Picton, Kingston, North Bay, Brantford, Long Branch, Woodstock and Chatham."

"This work must be done, but in the meantime the crops must be harvested. It is because of this condition that we are asking schoolboys to step in the breach, just as members of the 'Soldiers of the Soil' army did in 1917 and 1918," said the Premier.

In answer to some of the criticism directed against the plan, he released a letter received from the widow of a war veteran who farmed 150 acres. She had no help and on June 26 a student was sent to the farm.

"I am very well satisfied with him and I showed him the engagement papers for one year and gave him time to consider what he wished to do and to ask his people about it," she wrote. "He tells me they would like him to go to school again but he will stay with me until school opens. And I can only trust I can get one equally as good for the fall work or longer."

Twenty More Placed.

From one office in the Labor Department, twenty more Toronto boys were placed yesterday with farmers.

Arrangements are being developed as rapidly as possible to enlist the aid of secondary schoolgirls to assist the drive to sell war savings certificates. These are being made between J. Y. Murdoch, acting chairman of the Federal committee in Ontario and the Ontario Government.

"The whole effort will be made on a purely voluntary basis with no cost whatever to either the purchasers of certificates or to the Dominion Government," said Mr. Hepburn.

W. R. Reek, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, in reporting upon the harvest outlook, said "Ontario had an exceptionally good crop, but the biggest trouble lay in the fact that a lot of grain has been knocked flat by storms. What with the labor shortage, farmers are having extreme difficulty in harvesting it."

Admittedly, said the Deputy Minister, one of the most serious problems arose out of the impossibility of the farmer, under prevailing low price conditions, to compete in the labor market. "Farmers are not bitter about their hired men leaving them for war work," he said. "They figure that if the shoe was on the other foot and they were the hired men, they would go where the pay was highest. But in the meantime they are left holding the bag."

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