

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

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MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AT USK

Mr. R.S. Hudson's Address at the Monmouthshire County War Agricultural Executive Committee's Demonstration at the Agricultural Institute

You all know by now that I have had to make yet further demands upon you and all the farmers in this country. I have asked for an increase in the tillage acreage in England and Wales of at least another 500,000 acres, most of which will, I hope, be planted to wheat. That means a big new effort.

Let me congratulate Monmouth on having just about achieved the quota of 25,000 acres ploughing up which I set them. This year you are being asked for a comparatively modest increase of 5,000 acres.

At the same time the production of milk remains first priority nationally. As I said the other day, the milk sales in April and May were greater this year than last year or the year before. That is very gratifying. The increase has been substantial and it reflects great credit on the dairy farmers throughout the country. In spite of all their difficulties, particularly the shortage of labour and the increased work arising from the ploughing up, they are making it possible to maintain a very high level of consumption by the public. Consumption of liquid milk in England and Wales in May this year was over 86 million gallons, compared with the highest May figure pre-war of 66, an increase of 30 per cent. That is really a huge expansion in demand to have to meet in wartime.

I want, however, to strike a serious note of warning. I hope these results are not due to an increased tendency for spring calving and summer dairying. I know it is the easier system. I am also aware that it has been the practice in many parts of the country where the milk was used mostly for manufacture before the war. If the high summer milk figures arise from this tendency then it might well mean that supplies of milk next winter would be inadequate. I need hardly say that any shortage of milk in winter would be serious.

We know by experience that if we get sufficient supplies of winter milk, summer milk will look after itself. The great need is for more milk for the people in the winter months. I ask the dairy farmers of the country to keep this clearly in mind and to plan accordingly.

We know too that cows calving in autumn and winter give more milk over the year than those calving in the spring. The scientists claim that the average increase in yield is of the order of 10 per cent - at least 50 gallons per cow per annum. The prices paid to producers are heavily weighted in favour of winter milk. And what is most important of all, the need of the people in hard times ahead will be for abundant supplies of milk in the winter months. A system of arable dairying such as we now have to envisage in order to meet the shortage of imported feeding-stuffs should make it easier for dairy farmers to turn more and more to production of milk in the winter months.

In the Eastern and South Eastern counties and some other areas arable dairying and a high proportion of winter milk has been the tradition for years. I now ask the great dairying areas of the South West, Wales, and the North West to follow suit. They are now becoming arable farmers and I shall not be satisfied regarding our future milk supplies until I find these areas turning over to autumn calving and much heavier production in winter.

Dairy farmers in the West now have a great opportunity. Nothing can be done to-day to increase calvings for next winter's supplies, but we must think of the winter following, and I ask now that an increased number of heifers should be arranged for calving in the autumn of 1943.

You are being asked to submit your cropping programmes for 1943. I expect dairy farmers in the Western dairying areas to plan these programmes so as to grow a sufficiency of suitable feeding-stuffs to produce more winter milk. Better hay and much more silage will assist them considerably, not forgetting kale and where possible beans.

I hope that some of the things that you will see at this demonstration to-day and at others like it that are being held elsewhere will help you in your task.

I look forward therefore with confidence to a big expansion during the next 12 to 18 months of arable dairying throughout the Principality of Wales.