

Chichester Observer 17th January 1917 page 8

FOOD PRODUCTION PROBLEMS.

WAR AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
MEETING AT CHICHESTER.

POTATOES IN THE VILLAGES.

THE SUBSTITUTION SCHEME.

GERMAN PRISONERS FOR THE LAND.

All sorts of matters relating to the big question of food production are being dealt with by the War Agricultural Committee of the West Sussex County Council, and many items of special interest were discussed at a meeting of the Committee held at the Council House, Chichester, on Monday. Mr. F. H. Padwick, J.P., presided over a good attendance of members, including one lady—the Countess of March, who is devoting a great amount of time to the subject of food production in the county.

THE SUBSTITUTION SCHEME.

Some criticism was forthcoming on the results of substitution of labour by the military. Mr. H. W. Drewitt pointed out that they were taking a fit man away and putting a poor fool in his place.

The Chairman said the difficulty was created by the men not being bound to stay with the farmer. He had known of a case where the substitute stayed two days and then asked leave to go to another town and never came back. The farmer went to the military and they sent him another substitute, who also stayed two days and then went away. In the meantime his own good man had been taken.

Replying to the Rev. E. D. L. Harvey the Chairman said the men were not under the direction of the army but were free to do as they liked.

Mr. W. A. Mackenzie said there was to be a meeting with the Military the following day, when a substitution scheme would be prepared, and it was hoped that it would be put into operation next week.

Mr. O. N. Wyatt J.P. said he was told at the Chichester Tribunal last week by the Military Representative that a substitute was sent for a week and if not satisfactory another was sent for another week and the usual employee was not taken until the matter had been brought again to the notice of the Tribunal.

The Chairman said this was not so in practice. On the suggestion of Mr. J. Rapley it was decided to wait until the scheme was made known.

COMMANDEERING SEED POTATOES.

The Chairman informed the meeting that he recently saw Sir Sydney Olivier, of the Board of Agriculture, and he assured him that within two or three days all the seed potatoes in the country would be commandeered.

Mr. A. C. Harris: Of course that would not apply to the cottagers.

The Chairman: I was told all seed potatoes.

Mr. W. Lawson, the Agricultural Organizer, said that it would be difficult to commandeer potatoes in the hands of small men.

Mr. H. A. Rigg, K.C., said the question being asked in the parishes was whether they could have the amount they required.

Mr. Lawson replied that there was a limit of five cwt.

The Chairman: If early potatoes, a ton is required to plant an acre; in crop fifteen cwt.

Mr. Harris said if the potatoes were to be commandeered it would discourage a man holding his own seed, which he had always done. In his own parish the men had their own seed and they had sufficient.

The Chairman suggested that they were not alive to the benefits of a change in seed.

The Countess of March remarked that many villagers had been grateful for the suggestion that they would do better for a change of seed.

Mr. Mackenzie said at West Dean last year they gave the people their seed potatoes, with the result that they nearly doubled the crop of their own seed. They were now asking for fresh seed.

The Chairman: You did good by opening their eyes.

Mr. Rapley, referring to a statement that there was likely to be a shortage of seed potatoes, said this was not very encouraging to them to plough up the land for the production of potatoes, if they were to find afterwards there was no seed available. They should get from the Board of Agriculture the quantity of seed potatoes required for the county.

Mr. Drewitt said 300 tons would apparently be required for West Sussex.

The Chairman replied that they would have all this information soon from the Board of Agriculture.

The Countess of March, as Chairman of the Ladies' Committee, said the cottagers, and those with small gardens in West Sussex, would require 110 tons.

The Chairman: Have they intimated what sort they would like?

The Countess of March: Twenty-six different sorts. (Laughter).

Mr. Drewitt: Twenty-six different names.

The Countess of March alluded to certain cottagers who had no gardens, and she was distressed to find that the owners refused their request to provide them.

Mr. Wyatt asked if there was any guarantee that the people would not eat the seed potatoes. (Laughter.)

The Chairman: We can only rely on the local Committees to safeguard such a thing.

The Countess of March mentioned that she had been to the Board of Agriculture and had had contradicted an idea that potatoes grown from the seed to be supplied would be commandeered.

In the course of further discussion Mr. Lawson said the idea of potato seed distribution originated at Funtington, and then it was copied on a large scale last year in Somersetshire.

It was decided that the question of seed potatoes should be left in the hands of the Ladies' Committee.

PIG KEEPING.

The Countess of March, referring to the

subject of pig keeping, asked whether she might write to Mr. Green, who it was said had a wonderful scheme for this branch of food production.

The Chairman said some of them would know what the scheme was, but he thought Mr. Green's hands were full with the work he was doing in other counties.

The Rev. E. D. L. Harvey asked Lady March if she had found anyone in the villages willing to keep pigs.

The Countess replied that she had not asked. If farmers could not keep them how were the cottagers?

The Chairman doubted whether they would find many cottagers to keep pigs. It might be better in two or three months, when they would have green food and garden refuse. He had, however, found in his own village that some were willing to keep pigs, and they had bought them.

It was agreed that Lady March should write as she suggested.

THE NEEDS OF FARM LABOUR.

Mr. Lawson presented returns on the result of the inspection of farms in West Sussex. There were no reports from Midhurst and East Preston, but in the other six rural districts 2,439 farms were inspected, of which 1,795 were satisfactory, 619 unsatisfactory and 27 derelict. The requirements of labour he classified as under:

Class A, satisfactory farms: 95 carters, 53 ploughmen, 18 machine men, 101 stockmen, 31 shepherds, 115 labourers, 33 thatchers, total 748. In addition they required 187 women.

Class B, unsatisfactory farms: 72 carters, 30 ploughmen, 5 machine men, 48 stockmen, 15 shepherds, 192 labourers, and 19 thatchers were required, making a total of 381. In addition they required 37 women.

The total number required for all classes were 1,129 men and 218 women. These were required to keep the farms going in their present condition without regard to increased production.

Mr. Lawson also said that the amount of grass land which was suitable and could be spared for ploughing up for oats was 3,573 acres and for potatoes, 347 acres. The number of tractors owned in the six districts was 27, with one exception they were fully employed in suitable weather.

In the course of a discussion it was stated that the returns would be sent to the President of the Board of Agriculture, who would go to the Food Controller and ask what he could supply.

GERMAN PRISONERS FOR THE LAND.

The meeting agreed to support an application by Steyning to employ German prisoners of War.

The Chairman explained that under the present scheme not less than 75 would be sent in any of the batches, and their employment must be for not less than two months and within three miles of where they were stationed. They would be guarded by military and would be sent out in batches of not less than five. There would be 7,000 available for the whole of England for agricultural purposes. The prohibited area regulations would not be enforced except in special cases like Newhaven.

GOLF CLUBS TO HELP.

The Committee decided to ask the Bognor and Selsey Golf Clubs to raise hay on the fairway of the course or let them for grazing.

FOOD PRODUCTION.

The Council sat as a Committee to consider the question of food production.

The Town Clerk read the report of the Recreation Ground Committee and Allotment Managers, which shewed that a letter had been received from the Local Government Board stating that the Order did not apply to such lands as the Recreation Ground, which, it had been suggested, should be ploughed up for cultivation. The Committee recommended, however, that the north part of the Recreation Ground be ploughed up and sown with oats, the result of which it was pointed out would be levelling of the ground for future use as a recreation ground. It was decided to ascertain whether Mr. Pitts' field north of "Ellerslie" in St. Paul's Road, the site of the Bacon Factory, and a plot of land belonging to Mr. Wellcome in Grove Road, would be available for cultivation.

Inquiries had been made of the seed merchants as to the quantity of seed potatoes available in the city with the result that it was found there was little seed for sale, but the usual quantities were being ordered. The quantity estimated to be required in the city was ten tons. The Committee had also considered the question of waiving the bye-laws for pig keeping.

The Mayor read a notice which had been issued inviting applications for allotments.

Alderman Gibbings, referring to the field at the top of St. Paul's Road, urged the desirability of bringing fresh land into cultivation rather than taking land from a farmer which was already producing more than it would yield if made into allotments.

The Town Clerk said Mrs. Henty, the owner of this land, was most willing to do all in her power in the matter, and she was thanked by the Council for giving her consent, but it was pointed out that the land was not likely to be available.

Councillor Follett suggested the Fair Field in Oaklands Park as suitable for allotments for the Somerstown people.

Councillor Leggatt urged that the men wanted cheap land. He was going to suggest Mr. Arthur Henty's park, but that would want a lot of fencing off.

Councillor Aylmore said he had made inquiries about the Bacon Factory site and found that they would be able to have it.

Alderman Gibbings: How much ground is there?

Councillor Aylmore: Two or three acres.

Alderman Gibbings suggested that if there was no demand for allotments the Council should take the land and work it themselves, Mr. Prothero had said he would make it alright afterwards. He criticised the condition of some of the allotments near the cemetery, remarking that some of them were practically all grass and groundsel.

Replying to Councillor Hopkins as to the disposal of the potatoes if the Council did the

work themselves the Mayor read a letter from Councillor Butler (Vice-Chairman of the Committee) mentioning that they could be supplied to the Guardians.

Councillor Aylmore: Or sell them to the Hospital at cost price.

The report was eventually passed, and it was decided that during the war the bye-laws as to the keeping of pigs be waived, subject to the approval of the Medical Officer of Health or the Inspector of Nuisances, with the view of increasing the food production of the country, and that a notice be issued notifying the above and that leaflets on pig keeping can be obtained on application.

CULTIVATION OF WASTE LAND.

The following report was submitted by the Allotment Managers:—

"Cultivation of waste land: The circular letter from the Board of Agriculture, dated December 12th was considered, together with a plan prepared by the Deputy Surveyor, shewing vacant plots. Ordered that the Estate Office be approached with a view to the acquisition of the plots marked on the plan.

Notices inviting applications for land for cultivation were ordered to be published.

Mr. Hayward said two meetings had been held in connexion with this matter. At the first it was decided by the Committee that they should apply for all those places in view of the possibility

of their wanting to acquire them. They had received a reply from the Estate Office, and in three or four cases obtained consent, and would, no doubt, get it in other cases if necessary. At the second meeting there were several applications before them, and so far as he knew all applicants were satisfied insofar as allotments being allocated them. Whether they would accept them he did not know. If there were further applications they still had land which they could allot. Of course, in some cases it would involve a certain amount of hard work, but this was naturally expected, as it was not like cultivated ground, and they would not have everything their own way. The Surveyor was directed to stump out the plots already acquired, and this was about as far as they could go at present. The Committee had, however, lost no time in getting to work, and he thought the Council would agree they had done everything under the circumstances in the time they had had at their disposal to go into the matter.

The Chairman said he hoped there would be a sufficient quantity of applications to take up this spare land. It was desirable that the land should be made the fullest advantage of.

Mr. Constable asked whether all their old plots were under cultivation.

It was stated in reply that practically all the old plots were still tenanted. In cases where the men had gone, arrangements were made for the wives or someone else to manage them. Irrespective of these, though, Mr. Hayward stated they had something like thirty applications over and above the usual.

The Chairman enquired whether the land the Allotments Committee had in view was grass-land, or what.

Mr. Hayward explained that it was what had been reserved for building purposes in vacant parts of the town. Among the places where plots were being acquired were at the top of Arundel Road, North Ham Road, Goda Road, on the Beach, and in St. Flora's Road. It comprised from two to two-and-a-half acres.

The Chairman also asked whether the first occupier would have to turn up the grass land, or whether they were making arrangements to plough it.

Mr. Hayward said they were not making arrangements to plough the land, as they thought it would be more beneficial to cultivators to turn it up themselves.

The Chairman said the wives of several men on service had told him of their intention to cultivate the plots themselves. This was greatly to their credit.

Mr. Butt questioned if there was any suggestion that the Council should cultivate land not taken up by private enterprise.

The Chairman said further applications might yet be received, in which contingency the necessity for the consideration of such a course would not arise. Afterwards it would be for them to consider whether it would be in the national interest that they should take up the land and cultivate it themselves.

Mr. Hayward said he thought the idea was that everyone should have a piece of land, and cultivate it themselves.

The Chairman replied that they were doing it in other places.

Mr. Hayward said they had a very large number of allotment holders. He thought, as regards the regular allotments, that they did far better than any other locality for the size of the town throughout England. This had been so for some years, so that there was not the difficulty over the question there as there would have been in places which had not the allotments they had.

Mr. Barrett observed that the Allotments Committee had seemed to him to have grappled this matter firmly, and they could not do better than leave it in their hands.