

SOME NOTES ON CHAFF AND HAY ACQUISITION 1944

Compiled by P.G. Angove, July 1976

References:

Statistical Register of South Australia - part 5

Hansard

The Chronicle

The Maitland Watch

Various personal enquiries

Unfortunately, Minute Books and various Government Dockets dealing with this matter cannot be found.

The year 1944 was particularly dry and it is still remembered as one of the <sup>worst</sup> drought years in South Australia.

Mean rainfall for 42 years in the agricultural areas to that time was 15.22 inches per annum and from April to November, the mean was 12.24 inches. In 1944, the corresponding figures were only 10.68 inches and 8.84 inches respectively.

With a shortage of 30% of rainfall in both the growing period and in the whole year, it was natural that yields should be drastically reduced. To that time, the mean yield of wheat for the whole state had been 10.67 bush, per acre. In 1944/45, only 5.70 bush per acre were gathered.

The major problem was to feed the traction power of the agriculturist which then consisted of 154,000 horses. In addition it was hoped to protect the milk supply of the metropolitan area and large country townships. Stud dairy herds were also a high priority.

The average hay yield for the State in 1941, 1942 and 1943 was 574,000 tons. In 1944, only 317,000 tons was gathered including the 60,000 tons gathered by the Government.

The Government recognised before harvest the desperate position that farmers were facing

On 5th October 1944, a Chaff and Hay Acquisition Act was gazetted and a Committee of four was appointed to administer the Act.

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Thomas Francis Rice (Chief Store Keeper) Chairman

Robert Colin Scott (Department of Agriculture) Member

Herbert Mohn Modra (Representing Chaff Merchants) Member

Thomas Shanahan Jr. (of Freeling - representing farmers) Member

Mr. M.L. Dennis - later Chairman of the Public Service Board, was Secretary.

The main provisions of the Act were that the Committee could acquire any chaff or hay within the State or any standing crop which was capable of being made into hay.

The price of hay was £5-15-0 per ton delivered Adelaide but this was later raised to £5-10-0 in the stock and £6-5-0 in the stack on farms.

There was some hostility to compulsory acquisition but in the main, farmer co-operation in the more favoured areas was tremendous. From all of the hay gathered, only two crops and a limited amount of hay stacked in previous seasons was compulsorily acquired.

Mr. Jenkins (later Sir George Jenkins) Minister for Agriculture announced in Parliament on 2nd November 1944 that the following hay had been purchased:-

Yorke Peninsula	15,932 tons with the possibility of an additional 1,000 tons
Eyre Peninsula	15,545 tons
Other areas	772 tons
Acquired	872 tons

The final figures for purchases were:-

Yorke Peninsula	25,100 tons
Eyre Peninsula	17,500 tons
All other (including imports)	18,022 tons
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>60,622 tons</u>

Much of the "All other" purchases of 18,000 tons came from the South East where property owners voluntarily cut and baled meadow hay for use by the Committee. The exact amount is unknown.

It is known that contracts were made with New Zealand for 500 tons, Western Australia for 9,400 tons, New South Wales 4,000 tons, and Tasmania for 100 tons of compressed chaff. Not all of this hay was delivered and the figures were included above.

Some hay from New South Wales was of very poor quality and the Committee refused to pay for it. This led to a court case which was not settled until December 1948.

Of the 25,000 tons gathered on Yorke Peninsula, approximately 16,000 tons was stacked on the property of Mr. J.S. Honner at Maitland. Some 5,000 tons were stacked on the Paskeville oval and 3,000 tons were stacked at Port Vincent. A further 1,000 tons was purchased in stacks that had been made in previous years.

To effect this rapid gathering, the Committee was required to find labour and machinery. Two new 8 foot cut binders were purchased together with 12 second hand binders made up of 8 x 6 foot cuts and 4 x 8 foot cuts. In addition 2 x 8 foot cut binders were hired and one tractor was hired.

At one stage there were over sixty men camped in the Maitland Show Pavilion including twenty students from Roseworthy College and fifteen men from the army. There were similar but smaller camps at Paskeville and Port Vincent.

The "Maitland Watch" makes many references to the entertainment provided for hay makers in the Congregational Hall.

Port Vincent hay was chaffed and shipped to Adelaide by ketch. Maitland hay was chaffed and travelled by road to Paskeville and thence by rail to destinations in the north and in the Murray Mallee.

Distribution of all purchases by the Committee was through the existing network of Chaff and Hay merchants in the metropolitan and drought areas.

An interesting sidelight was a Government decision to allow one or two metropolitan cow owners one bag of chaff per cow per week to maintain the family milk supply. These cows were mainly grazing on the Adelaide park lands.

Hay was desperately short throughout 1945 and the Committee was able to make sales of chaff to a value in excess of £1 million. Despite the difficulties of farmers who purchased the hay, bad debts were less than £5.