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Doubling the Farmer's Wheat Dollar

By Charles W. Holman
(In the Country Gentleman)



DOUBLING the farmer's share of the wheat dollar is one of the wartime jobs Uncle Sam has done since food control became possible. After five months of grappling with the problem, Uncle Sam is now transferring into the pockets of both producers and consumers benefits derived by the Nation. He has shut off speculation, produced a free market and movement of all grades of wheat, cut expenses and induced a normal flow of wheat in natural directions, and effected a thousand other economies.

The Food Administration Grain Corporation, which supervises the sale, or itself buys every bushel of wheat produced in the Nation in its progress from country elevator to foreign buyers or domestic consumers, marks a new step toward national efficiency. In four short months it has been done. It is told in the following episodes wherein two bushels of wheat traveled to market.

One fine fall afternoon, Col. Bill Jenkins, who farms somewhere in Missouri, loaded his wheat into a wagon and drove along the black road that led across the prairie to town. When he reached the co-operative elevator of which he was a stockholder, he pulled up on the scales, checked his gross weights carefully, and began to unload. The manager came out and asked:

"When you want to sell this wheat?"
"I dunno," he answered. "One time's about as good as another—these days. 'T won't weigh any more later," he added, with a dry smile.

"Wheat shrinks a lot," admitted the manager. "I hear the Government wants as much wheat as it can get just now—understand the Allies do out a terrible lot of it since the war."

"What's wheat to-day?" asked Col. Jenkins, getting interested.

"We'll let me see," parleyed the manager. "I guess this wheat'd be a good No. 2 under the new grades."

"Grades? What about grades? That Food Administration seems to mix into

ly an administrative arm of the Government formed to buy grain or supervise its sale at the prices determined by the commission, and it must do its work on the basis of the new grades. But to return to our farmer and his expectations of price.

Introducing Two Bushels of Wheat.

Lying side by side in his wagon had been 2 bushels of wheat that fate had marked for strangely different ends. They were very much alike, those bushels of wheat, and to look at them you would not have suspected the strange and wonderful adventures in store for them. Yet one was destined to travel abroad for consumption in France; the other to find its way into Georgia, where it was milled and its flour finally reached a New York baker on the East Side. But in the sum of the travels made by the two, as we shall follow them, will be unfolded the international panorama of wheat marketing in time of war.

Finding a Price at a Country Point.

High war costs of production gave our Missouri farmer much concern as to his returns and accounted for his depression over the prospects of his wheat "grading down"; for that meant a reduction of 3 cents per bushel under the No. 1 grade. But it graded No. 2.

The elevator would also deduct an additional 5 cents a bushel to cover the fixed charge made in this locality for handling and selling. The 3-cent charge included the commission of 1 cent per bushel customary in 1917 among commission men for selling the wheat to domestic millers or foreign buyers.

The elevator man was none too sure as to how to get at the price which this wheat should bring. He knew considerably more about human nature than freight rates and decided to "check up" the problem to the nearest zone agent of the Grain Corporation. So he wrote a letter to the representative stationed at St. Louis. That letter was referred to the traffic expert in the New York office, who transmitted the following rule for determining

mighty nigh everything from rabbits to axle grease."

"Hold on, Colonel," said the elevator man, good-naturedly. "The Food Administration is not to blame. Congress passed the act and told the Department of Agriculture to fix the grades. They became effective last July. I sent out a letter on it."

"Well, I guess you better sell for the best you can," said the farmer. "I am needed at home." And he drove away.

A New Order in the Grain World.

CONVERSATIONS of this kind might have taken place in almost every town in the great grain belt of the Nation after August 10; for revolution in grain marketing was taking place. Uncle Sam had started on this remarkable experiment; he was going to see whether wheat could be marketed minus rake-offs to the speculators. This necessitated complete control by the Government of storage facilities, transportation and distributive agencies, and the marketing machinery for wheat and rye.

Everybody was troubled; most of all, the officials of the Food Administration Grain Corporation who had undertaken, without salary, and at the sacrifice of their personal connection with the grain trade, to whip into shape the forces that would drive forward the big business machine for marketing American wheat. A single control; and a \$50,000,000 non-profit-making corporation to do the work.

This work is a necessary arm of the Food Administration, allowing the Government to do business quickly and without red tape. Its stock is held in trust by the President of the United States. For the time of the war it will supervise the rate or purchase the part commercially available of the 600,000,000 bushels of wheat and the 50,000,000 surplus of rye grown in America in 1917. Its job is to find a market for every bushel, irrespective of class and grade. Under its patronage, wheat screenings are moving just as easily as No. 1 Northern. It must also work out satisfactorily the local prices for wheat at each of almost 20,000 country elevator points, adjust thousands of complaints, organize the gathering and analysis of data, inspect concerns reported as dealing unfairly, solve vexatious disagreements among the trade, and deal effectively with the allies' purchasing agent and the neutrals who may desire to purchase.

In the early days, following the determination of prices for 1917 wheat by the President's Fair Price Commission, confusion existed in every part of the wheat-producing regions. This was intensified by the inauguration of the new grain grades, as promulgated by the Department of Agriculture, which took place about the same time, and led to diverse complaints and a feeling among farmers that the Grain Corporation of the Food Administration was responsible for both the price as determined and stricter observance of grain grades. But the corporation was responsible for neither act. It is pure.

Continued next week's issue

D. W. Allen called yesterday and renewed his subscription, and ordered the News sent to J. J. Farrell at Canon City, Colo. Among others remembering the editor the past week were: Harry Hyde, Tom Jeffords and Miss Brown for Mrs. Donald Bates.

the price of wheat at any country point:

There is only one price for wheat at a country point. That price is always to be arrived at by taking as a basis the price at the most advantageous primary market where we have fixed a price and deducting the freight to that market and a fair handling profit. That is the price to be paid for wheat at any station, regardless of the point to which it may be shipped.

Working out the price which should be paid for wheat at your station is a fine occupation for an off day. If you cannot find the answer, write to the Food Administration Grain Corporation in New York City and its traffic expert will give you aid.

Finding the Price of No. 2 Wheat at Sikeston.

TAKE an actual example: An elevator man in Sikeston, Mo., wanted to know what price No. 2 wheat should bring at his station when No. 1 wheat at New York City was \$2.28 per bushel. Here is how he went about it:

The freight rate from Sikeston to New York being 10.98 cents per bushel, he deducted that from \$2.28 per bushel and found the price at Sikeston to be \$2.1702. From this he deducted 1 per cent per bushel for the commission firm's charges, which put the net price f. o. b. Sikeston at \$2.1602.

He next compared this price with what he could get if he sold at St. Louis, his nearest primary market. At St. Louis the basic price is \$2.18 per bushel, and the freight rate from Sikeston to St. Louis 6 cents per bushel. This would make the Sikeston price \$2.12, less 1 cent per bushel for selling charges, or \$2.11 net. The St. Louis price would therefore govern, being advantageous to the Sikeston seller.

If our imaginary 2 bushels of wheat had started from Sikeston, since it was a No. 2 grade, we must deduct 3 cents per bushel, which would bring the price f. o. b. the elevator point to \$2.0802 per bushel. As our imaginary elevator man is charging 5 cents per bushel for handling, which includes the commission fee just mentioned, we deduct an additional 4 cents to arrive at the price the farmer received. This price would be \$2.0402 at the elevator. Some of that 4 cents will return to our farmer if the elevator prospers; for it is owned co-operatively.

When Farmer and Elevator Man Disagree.

Had this elevator been owned by private firm or person, or had it been a "line" plant, Col. Jenkins would not have been so bland and trustful.

He might have refused to sell at all and arranged to store his wheat or he might have taken it over to a competitive concern which offered a higher price; for the Food Administration has not yet attempted to regulate the prices paid farmers for wheat at country points. It does, however, offer to sell for any farmer or farmers' organization wheat offered at terminal points, but makes a commission charge of 1 per cent for its services.



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