Montana Extension Service
in Agriculture and Home Economics
Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts
and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperating
Acts of Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914

NUMBER 20 MAY 1, 1917

Flax Situation in 1917

BY
M. L. WILSON
County Agent Leader.

WHY FLAX PRICE IS HIGH

United States' annual consumption of flax as reported by the flax-consuming industries is 29,000,000 bushels.

United States' flax crop for 1916, available this season, is 15,460,000 bushels.

Balance, to be met by importation, 13,540,000 bushels.

This domestic deficit intensifies a world flax shortage and almost impossible import conditions.

Flax-exporting countries at war have embargoes on flax.

Lack of flax for seed and linseed oil for industries in Europe indicates that there will be little or no flax to import.

Abnormally high ocean freight rates make imports costly.

FLAX AN INDUSTRIAL NECESSITY

Flax production in the Northwest is properly classified as important in the 1917 crop program. World conditions seem to definitely guarantee that the present high price for flax will be maintained for at least one full year and probably for a longer period. The prospect ahead of the farmer of the Northwest holds out a pledge of exceptionally high prices for flaxseed.

Owing, in a measure, to the fact that last year three of the five great flax-producing countries of the world were engaged in war, but also due in an immediate and larger sense to the almost complete failure of this crop in Argentina, which is a very large producer of flax, the flax crop of the world in 1916 fell many millions of bushels below normal production.

The average annual consumption of flaxseed in the United States is approximately 29,000,000 bushels. The 1916 crop in the United States available to meet the present season's needs for seed and commercial purposes has been reported by the U. S. Department of Agriculture at 15,460,000 bushels.

The question facing the farmer and the user of flaxseed products is, **Where can this shortage, which is the difference between domestic need and domestic production, be made up?** This phase of the world flax situation emphasizes the need of a largely increased flax acreage in the northwestern States this season.

Canada normally exports several million bushels of flax. Great Britain and her allies, however, may definitely demand the large proportion of this surplus. Our manufacturers, therefore, can not expect to import the normal supply from Canada.

The 1916 flax crop in Argentina was less than 20 per cent of the normal and the cost of getting this to the United States is very high. Great Britain has prohibited the exportation of flaxseed from India, except to herself and her allies. Russia, with no opportunity to export flax, has placed an embargo on it.

The supply outlook of the United States falls short of the demand by several million bushels. There appears to be no factor in sight at this time that will prevent a continuation of prevailing high prices.

At about this season, in years of peace and normal crops, conditions make for comparatively easy markets and relatively low prices for flax. Ordinarily, large exportations to Europe from Argen-

tina and the prospect of early marketing of the Indian crop cause lowered prices for flax in the early spring. Yet prices this year hold to their lofty level. Reports from leading world markets last month show the following quotations per bushel of flax:

	Mar. 20, 1917	One year ago
Argentina, South America	$2.35	$1.26
London, England	3.65	2.37
Winnipeg, Canada	2.65	2.06
Duluth, Minnesota	2.92	2.27

Shortage of flax for seed, linseed oil for industrial purposes, and the oil-cake for animal food in some European countries now at war and in many countries now neutral but practically blockaded, points to a future demand that will operate against any material and immediate drop in flax prices at the close of the war.

IT CONCERNS THE NORTHWEST

Flax as a crop has moved steadily westward with the opening of new lands to agriculture, until it has reached the point where North Dakota and Montana are relied upon as leading flax-producing States. Its place as a crop for new land in these States is assured. Increasing attention to it as a crop for old land and as a cash-producing item in an intelligent crop rotation is following the realization that flax is not chemically hard on land. It is a crop of average certainty where carefully chosen, disease-resistant seed is used.

Based on prices December 1, 1916, the Monthly Crop Report of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, showing the value per acre of the leading crops in four northwestern States, gives flax an excellent rating. In three States—Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota—flax led spring wheat, oats, barley, and rye in its average value per acre in 1916. In Montana it yielded first place to spring wheat.

	Spring wheat	Oats	Barley	Rye	Flax
Minnesota	$11.83	$12.46	$16.53	$19.05	$20.40
North Dakota	8.36	9.46	12.40	16.62	25.96
South Dakota	9.45	14.03	18.84	21.24	22.97
Montana	28.98	17.86	21.28	19.68	23.56

Because of the activity of farmers in the leading flax-producing counties in Montana in producing weed-free, disease-resistant flax

of a specified variety known as N. D. R. No. 52 (North Dakota Resistant No. 52), with the encouragement and under the direction of the Montana Experiment Station, an abundant supply of flax seed excellently adapted to Montana conditions is on hand in the State this spring.

In 1915 certified seed which had been developed by Prof. H. L. Bolley at the North Dakota Experiment Station, was brought into this State and distributed among farmers in Sheridan County to sow in their pure-seed plots. These farmers planted plots of 10 acres each, which they carefully separated from surrounding fields by open spaces and from which they pulled by hand such weeds as appeared. When harvest time came, this seed flax was carefully threshed in separators that had been thoroughly cleaned to eliminate alien seeds. It was then sealed and certified by county agents. The first year there were 32 such plots in Sheridan County. In 1916, 120 farmers produced pure flax seed on seed plots in Sheridan and neighboring counties. This season approximately 200 farmers will put in similar pure-seed plots.

The prevailing high prices may have tempted some farmers to part with flax which should have been held for seed. It is considered timely and of first importance that farmers who have good flax which they will need for seed should hold it, and those who have not secured their spring flax seed supply should take immediate steps to obtain it.

Information that will connect farmers who need seed with sources where pure, disease-resistant seed of a specified variety may be secured, will be furnished any one who writes for that purpose to the Montana Experiment Station, Bozeman, Montana.