

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT NO. 4. SIXTY-FIFTH
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
MASSACHUSETTS STATE BOARD OF
AGRICULTURE. PART I. REPORT OF
SECRETARY AND OTHER OFFICERS, 1917**

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MASSACHUSETTS

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PART I.

REPORT OF SECRETARY AND OTHER OFFICERS.

1917.



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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SIXTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE.

PART I.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY FOR THE YEAR 1917.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

To write the agricultural history of 1917 would be as difficult as it is to write the political history of the same time, for our perspective is so shortened by the near view that we are apt to treat essentials as non-essentials, and *vice versa*.

In the beginning of the year our nearness to the great war was making itself felt in many ways, — prices of all commodities were going up; there was a general unrest in all branches of industry; labor troubles were numerous; and our government was striving to keep the country out of the general conflagration that was devouring the world. Agriculture was feeling the added burdens severely; not alone had crops been uncertain, but materials common to the needs of agriculture were increasing rapidly in price, and the labor market, never too sure, was upset to a degree rarely experienced in our country.

Early in the spring the war came, and with it a demand upon the agricultural resources of the country such as it had never experienced before. We immediately became the allies of the nations fighting Germany, and as such were bound to share our bread with them. These nations, having borne the burden of the battle for nearly three years, had reduced their agricultural

production to a low ebb, and the wastes of war had taken such a toll that they looked to America to supply the deficiency. America's position to do this was none too bright, for she had experienced a year of light crops, and, further, was called upon at a time when at least one-half of the country had already planted, and the other half, while willing in many instances, did not have the seed, fertilizer or capital to increase. However, the country as a whole rallied splendidly to the call, and food crops in great quantity were planted. In some sections of the south cotton was plowed under and corn planted. The Federal government had, among the many difficult questions to contend with, that of assisting those sections of the country which had been used to importing their food supply largely from other sections. The south and New England were particularly affected by this, as both grew little of what they consumed, and neither had the facilities for growing either cereals or food animals in sufficient quantities to meet their needs. So it was necessary in these particular cases, in so far as possible, to provide substitutes. The planting of corn, beans, peas and potatoes was urged, and the response all over the country has been generous, so that this year America has the distinction of having produced the largest crops, excepting wheat, in its history. Never has there been such a patriotic response on the part of the farmers of the country for increasing their crops. In the face of labor conditions and high prices of materials, they faced financial ruin in case crops did not turn out well or prices dropped; and in spite of general high prices many of them have produced at a loss, and are in no safe position to produce another year. Yet the expression "Conserve or serve" is as truly fitting in relation to the farmer as it is to every one else in the country. We are fighting this war to maintain the right to live our lives under no dictation by any foreign ruler, and sacrifices are as important in reaching this ideal as they were in the days of the Revolution. The country has got to increase its resources as it has never done before, and of these resources agriculture is second to none. The establishment of minimum prices for our crops is a questionable proceeding, for the minimum may as easily be too low as too high. No one can foresee the future well enough to tell what the crop will be

nor the cost of producing it. Costs based on past experience will not hold good for the future, as conditions are changing from day to day. Prices are usually affected not so much by overproduction, but rather by poor distribution and lack of proper methods of conservation. These two very important subjects are being carefully looked after for 1918, and should allay the fears of the farmer that a fair price will not be realized.

CROPS OF 1917.

Taken the country over, crops have varied more than usual. The familiar cry that crops have failed in certain sections has been true to a great degree. Certainly many sections of the country never have suffered from bad weather conditions as they have this year. The great grazing States have suffered so from drought that hundreds of thousands of cattle are perishing for lack of food. Late cold spring and early fall frost have reduced our largest corn crop to an appreciable degree. Severe winter weather and wet spring made inroads upon the wheat crop, none too large. Cotton in some States was badly affected by the boll weevil, but on the whole is a fair crop. Potatoes, with the exception of Maine, are well above the average, and the quality is reported good. Cereals, while averaging well, are difficult to move and late in reaching the market at this writing. Corn in the great southwest is still unhusked, and it will be some time before the new crop reaches the market.

Massachusetts is not one of the leading agricultural States, and the increase or decrease of agricultural production here cannot have a controlling or even a vital effect on the war. At the same time, it would be foolish to minimize the importance of increased production of food within the borders of our Commonwealth, because every pound of food produced here will replace one that would otherwise have to be brought to us over railroads already overburdened, and will release a pound that can be sent abroad to our army and our allies. For this reason it is a source of gratification not only that larger acreages than usual of farm crops were planted in Massachusetts in 1917, but that the season's crops turned out well, both in quantity and quality, with one or two notable exceptions.

Spring was even later than in 1916, and prospects for planting during May did not look encouraging.

The following table shows the rainfall for the first ten months of 1917. As will be seen, the rainfall of $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in May and 4 inches in June was abnormally high, and in addition, May in 1917 was the coldest May recorded in this State for eighty years:—

		<i>Rainfall.</i>	
		<i>Inches.</i>	<i>Inches.</i>
January,	2.82	June,	4.05
February,	2.67	July,	1.10
March,	3.73	August,	7.06
April,	2.72	September,	1.91
May,	4.45	October,	5.33

Hay made a large crop, though not as large as in 1916; the surplus in New England, however, from the previous year, together with the continual slaughter of cattle due to high grain prices and scarcity of labor, combined to force the price of hay down, so that this has been the only important crop for which the price during 1917 has been appreciably lower than normal. In some sections of this State and other New England States loose hay at the barn has sold as low as \$10 per ton. As a result of the low price and the shortage of labor hundreds of acres of grass were not cut at all, and it is obvious that one of our principal needs here in Massachusetts is an increase in live stock to furnish an outlet for our surplus roughage.

The apple crop was very spotty in character, some sections of the State showing a larger yield than in 1916, and others very much smaller. On the whole, however, the crop averaged about 20 per cent less than in 1916. The quality of the crop was splendid, and a much larger quantity has been placed in storage than a year ago.

The cranberry crop was very badly injured by the frost of early September, which affected Cape Cod with unexpected severity. This frost not only cut down the yield fully 30 per cent, but the keeping qualities of a large percentage of the crop gathered was damaged so that it can hardly last a month.

Probably the *largest potato acreage in the history of Massachusetts* was planted in 1917, and up to the 1st of September conditions looked favorable for a crop of proportional size.