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Monthly Report
Crop and Business Conditions In The
Ninth Federal Reserve District.

MAY

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When all of the conditions entering into the crop prospect for the Ninth Federal Reserve District at this date are considered, it is doubtful if the Northwest has ever had a finer outlook at this season. The wheat crop, upon which so many hopes hang, and which is a factor of such unusual importance during wartime, presents a most attractive appearance all the way West to the Rocky Mountains. Grain has rooted firmly, and the plants are strong, with a fine color and an even, strong growth. It is noticeable that it is very difficult to find a break in the rows made by the seed drills, which gives good promise of a large yield per acre.

In the western half of the district, particularly in the areas which ordinarily do not suffer from an excess of moisture, there have been timely rains which added to the moisture accumulated during previous months, have been of the greatest benefit to the crop. Moisture conditions in eastern Montana and the western half of North Dakota are very good.

The weather during the month has been uniformly cool and frost has appeared at some points. While some damage has occurred, one observer reports that on an extensive trip covering the greater part of the eastern half of North Dakota, he was unable to find but one field, that of barley, that appeared to have suffered any substantial damage. Some slight injury may have resulted from the frost, but the growth was not sufficiently advanced to have taken serious damage.

Of the various crops now above ground, rye is about the only one that shows any unsatisfactory characteristics. In some cases the fields are uneven, and show thin pots. The general condition of the crop is good, and as a whole the plant is probably equal to that of an average year.

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The only unsatisfactory feature of the present condition is that cool weather during the month has not brought the pastures forward as rapidly as would be desirable. The grass has not started to grow, and the pasturage is thin and unsatisfactory. In some cases, the grass has winter killed and will be slow coming back. As a result, farmers are using a greater amount of feed than is usual at this time. Ten days of warm growing weather will be needed to remedy this condition and supply satisfactory grass feed.

Corn planting is in very active progress throughout the district, and in the southern portion of Minnesota, in Wisconsin, and in the eastern half of South Dakota is already very well advanced. The corn acreage will be satisfactory, and very likely quite a little short of an average year.

Flax will be a short crop throughout the entire district. There will be a substantial decrease in acreage in North Dakota, although at the same time in both North Dakota and Montana there is considerable flax that has gone into new ground. The very high price of seed has had a good deal to do with the acreage planted in these states, and also in Minnesota and South Dakota.

Strong winds have been common during the month and from several localities there are reports of very severe rains, and one or two reports of violent hail storms. Some damage has occurred, but it is confined to limited areas, and owing to the fact that the crops are not yet far advanced, is not of any importance.

Business conditions throughout the district continue to show the influence of war. There is little doubt but that the general attitude of the people is conservative, and that the high price levels for practically all commodities are exercising an influence which is producing a cautious attitude in buying, with the result that the average man is spending his money carefully and is showing more signs of thrift than he has usually displayed. The volume of retail trade, in terms of money, is equal to or better than a year ago. In terms of goods moving, it is somewhat less. Those who were formerly rather liberal purchasers of articles of luxury are not buying as freely as they did, but this has been offset to a considerable extent by the appearance of a new class of buyers, representing those who have prospered through high wage rates and the unusual opportunities for profitable employment. Probably for the first time in the history of the Northwest, women have appeared during the month side by side with men in war industries, and dressed in special overall suits, are operating some of the lighter machine tools in the large plants. Shoulder to shoulder with them are many hundreds of young women who are beginning to be quite an element in the clerical forces of banks, large and small, where they have been called into service to replace men who have gone to the front or into the training camps.

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These developments present a very interesting study. It does not appear that the women have been able to make a full 100 percent record in taking over work formerly done by men, and in most cases an increased number of employees is necessary to handle the same volume of work. The women who are doing their bit are to be commended for their fine spirit, and are taking hold of new and unusual tasks in a very painstaking, earnest way. It is apparent to any observer in offices or departments where women in any number are employed, that they feel the responsibilities which have been placed upon them, and show a determination to make good and to the limit of their ability fill the places of those who have gone.

While the Northwest probably will not be forced to depend upon the labor of women to the same extent that more important industrial districts will, it is already evident that in banks, business houses and upon the farms, that they are performing a very valuable service which will increase in importance as the war progresses. An interesting development in this connection is that a severe shortage is occurring in the help available for household service, due very largely to the fact that many who formerly sought this class of employment, are replacing their brothers who have gone to the front, and have been called upon this year to assist in agricultural production.

The demand upon the banks throughout the district continues very active. Interest rates have not changed appreciably during the month nor has there been any serious difficulty in fully taking care of the demands of agriculture incident to heavy crop planting and the amount of spring work in progress at this time. The general outlook is very favorable, and a condition of substantial prosperity exists.

Future conditions depend very largely upon the progress of the crops. If the district is able to realize its present prospects, there is no question but that farmers will enjoy a greater prosperity than they have ever known before, which will reflect itself during fall and winter in very prosperous conditions in all lines of trade and in large bank deposits.