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Editorial.

SCIENCE IN FARMING.

This is the title of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Year Book for the period 1943-1947. Following the pattern of earlier Year Books, the first of which was written in present style in 1936, the 1943-1947 Year Book furnishes a comprehensive text-book on the tremendous contribution which science has made to agriculture in recent years.

One of the more interesting chapters deals with new practices in farming involving the use of new mechanical aids. Only by harnessing agriculture to the machine and short-circuiting time-honoured manual practices and animal tractive power, was America able to exercise a maximum effort in food production during the war. Now, a considerable leeway has to be made up in replacing worn-out equipment, building spare parts for old types of plant, and turning out sufficient machines to meet the requirements of an increasingly mechanised agriculture. An extract from the "Chicago Tribune" of issue 14th January, 1948, shows that if supplies were adequate, the American farmer would to-day buy 1,200,000 tractors and mathematical quantities of such other types of plant as combines, corn-pickers, harvesters, harrows, mowers, ploughs and pick-up balers. It has been estimated that compared with the position pre-war, hundreds of thousands of small farms have been mechanised. During the war agricultural manpower in America decreased by about one million persons, few of whom have returned to the farm. The American farmer, as a result, has thus been left no choice in substituting mechanical for manual power. This is a 20th century revolution in farming.

The position may be paralleled in this country where shortages of farm equipment and supplies of all kinds are holding up plans for an expanded food production. There would appear to be no limit set, for the time being, to the amount of food which Australia can produce to meet existing orders. Without sufficient equipment, however, the effort is laborious and slow. A critical shortage of agricultural machinery and spare parts, of wire netting, galvanised iron, piping, electric motors and many other items, constitutes one of the major handicaps to expansion of agriculture in Australia at the present time.