

FIELDS DIVISION

REPORT OF P. W. SMALLFIELD, DIRECTOR

For the twelve months ended 31st March, 1944, climatic conditions were extremely variable, and whereas some districts experienced fairly good conditions, other districts suffered from unfavourable weather at some period of the year. The outstanding features were, in the main, a dry and cold autumn followed by a wet and cold winter and consequent late spring. Good conditions prevailed during the early summer, but as the season advanced it became very hot, with a consequent drying up of the pastures. Generally, however, good rains fell from late February onwards with most beneficial effects.

CROPS

Arable Crops.—A drive aimed at securing an increased acreage of wheat did not meet with the success desired, largely due to the vagaries of the weather at planting-time. In actual fact, the estimated area sown is 249,000 acres, which is approximately 40,000 acres less than that for the previous season. Again the average yield per acre as disclosed by the area already threshed is down on the 1942-43 yield by slightly over 5 bushels per acre. In 1942-43 the average yield was 33.97 bushels per acre, while the area of the 1943-44 crop threshed to date shows a yield of 28.6 bushels per acre. Basing calculations on figures at present available, it is estimated the total yield of wheat for 1943-44 season will be approximately 7,250,000 bushels.

The estimated area sown to oats for 1943-44 is 220,000 acres. This is also a decrease on the area sown the previous year. In that year 242,365 acres were sown.

The estimated area sown in barley in 1943-44 increased from 35,261 to 41,000 acres.

Potatoes.—The area planted in potatoes for 1943-44 is estimated at 25,000 acres. This is a slight increase on the previous season's acreage of 23,860. It is yet too early to give a definite indication of what the yield will be, but it is expected this will be lighter than the previous year, due largely to the dry weather during the growing season.

SERVICES' VEGETABLE-PRODUCTION

During the past year a considerable proportion of the professional officers of the Fields Division have been occupied with the supervision of Services' vegetable-production projects, the total number of such projects now being twenty-seven, embracing an area of 5,200 acres. Although the developmental period has passed, this total acreage is not yet fully in production, as more than half this acreage came into occupation during the past year. At the end of February, 1944, approximately 3,000 acres of the total area occupied was in crop. From this effective acreage the following vegetables were delivered to the Armed Forces for the period ending 31st March, 1944 :—

	Tons.
Army	6,409 (approx.)
Navy	270 (approx.)
Air Force	1,706 (approx.)
Other, including United States Forces	11,175
Total	19,560

Supply.—During the past year all supply arrangements, other than to New Zealand Army and Air Force, have been under the direction and control of the Internal Marketing Division. Under this arrangement all produce from Services' vegetable-production areas is made available first to the Armed Services, including the United States Forces, and, in the event of insufficient demand from these Services, the remaining consumable vegetables are being distributed by the Internal Marketing Division on the civilian market.

COUNCILS OF PRIMARY PRODUCTION

The District Councils of Primary Production have been helpful in many directions, and their services have been largely availed of in the matter of keeping up and increasing, where possible, the production of foodstuffs.

Man-power on Farms.—During the year District Councils have been engaged to a very large extent in looking into the man-power position on farms. Much time has been spent in appealing for the retention of full-time farmers and farm workers and in making representations for the release of these from the Armed Forces. They have also been called on by many Appeal Boards to report on the validity of personal appeals connected with primary production. District Councils have had to estimate the number of Territorials required to assist with the harvesting.

Lease-lend Materials.—District Councils have now additional duties in reporting on the release of lease-lend materials to individual farmers.

FIELD EXPERIMENTS

The drastic curtailment of this work is shown by the number of trials listed below :—

1941-42	945
1942-43	477
1943-44	228

Pasture Trials.—The work now in hand on this project includes mowing trials at Marton, where yields from areas top-dressed with serpentine-superphosphate and other phosphatic fertilizers are being compared and a number of observational trials laid down throughout the Dominion. In Southland the value of Clarendon phosphate on grassland is also being investigated. At Marton and Winton production from various pasture species is also being measured and a new series of trials with H1 rye-grass is being established. The rate-of-growth trials at Ruakura and Stratford are being continued.