

FIELDS DIVISION

REPORT OF J. W. WOODCOCK, ACTING-DIRECTOR

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

The weather varied considerably during the 1947-48 season, except during late summer and autumn, when dry weather became fairly general throughout the Dominion.

In Auckland Province a mild and wet winter was followed by a favourable and early spring; January, February, and March were dry and warm. In Wellington Province rainfall was relatively low during the winter and early spring, except for heavy falls in June and October. November was exceptionally dry in all districts, and dry conditions continued throughout the summer except in North Taranaki. By the end of March the Rangitikei, Manawatu, Wairarapa, and southern Hawke's Bay districts were experiencing a major drought, but heavy rains in January and March fortunately saved the remainder of Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay from excessively dry conditions.

In Canterbury wet periods in April, May, and June delayed the cultivation and sowing of winter crops. The winter was comparatively mild and characterized by good weather without excessive rain, but heavy rain again in October delayed spring sowings. Useful rains fell in the summer in most districts, accompanied by much sunshine and some north-west winds. Altogether, the weather was very suitable for harvesting, but tended to be too dry in summer for best results from pastures and crops. In Otago and Southland the weather in winter and spring were drier than usual, with the result that spring-sown crops were established under favourable conditions and pasture growth during the mild spring was exceptionally good. The season generally was earlier than usual and dry conditions favoured harvesting, though on the lighter lands yields of crops and pasture seeds suffered in consequence.

PASTURES

Pasture growth generally was favourable during the early part of the season, but with dry conditions during late summer pastures were affected adversely in most districts.

In Auckland Province growth was well maintained until about mid-January, when the dry weather had a retarding effect over the whole of the province to a greater or less degree. In some districts, including the Waikato, Thames, and the northern King-country, the dry conditions were more severe and pastures became very browned off. Despite increased conservation of hay, considerable pasturage was wasted during the peak periods. The pastures on the Central Plateau, which had deteriorated severely because of shortage of fertilizer during the war years, have recovered considerably.

With the mild winter and good spring experienced in Wellington Province, pasture growth up to November was very good and good crops of both hay and silage were harvested in most districts. The heavy rains of October gave pastures an excellent start into the summer, but the extremely dry conditions in November and December stopped growth, except in the lower Horowhenua and north and central Taranaki districts. Summer growth was very short and the season ended with bare pastures in the Wairarapa, Manawatu, and Wanganui districts, and a fair recovery of greenness, but with no surplus growth, in other districts where good rains fell in late March.

Pasture growth in Canterbury during the late autumn of 1947 was very good and was followed by normal growth in the winter. Growth was again good in spring and early summer, but, especially on light land, grass growth was much retarded by dry conditions from December to March. Consequently, in some districts the feed position at the start of the winter is not good.