

lectures and personal visits to plants, in addition to that given in answer to correspondence; and a general desire, as evidenced by the correspondence received, to use higher-grade animals of a more suitable type to meet the market requirements is an encouraging sign, and should result in a better-class article being prepared for export. The quantity of pork and bacon exported was 4,583,933 lb., of a value of £135,508, being an increase of over 100 per cent. on the exports of the previous twelve months.

RABBIT NUISANCE.

The end of the winter of 1923 saw the rabbit pest very considerably reduced in very many districts, and had systematic and simultaneous following-up work been the rule rabbits would not today be in such large numbers as they are. The winter was followed by ideal breeding conditions, and breeding continued practically right throughout the summer and early autumn months; and although, on the whole, a good season for poisoning, it was nevertheless difficult to hold the rabbits in check, and the end of the year arrived with rabbits more numerous than was desirable.

There is a very genuine and praiseworthy desire on the part of a considerable number of land-occupiers to have rabbits reduced to a minimum, but, unfortunately, on the part of others there seems an utter lack of any serious attempt at improvement, and this is greatly retarding the work of the others and the efforts of the Department. The high price of rabbit-skins is still a marked factor in blocking the way to the improved conditions necessary, and undoubtedly the effect of the trapping industry, combined with dilatory owners, unfinancial and bad farmers, is very largely responsible for retarding increased production of live-stock and live-stock products to the extent of millions of pounds in value. The total value of the export trade in rabbits and their skins is scarcely half a million sterling, in spite of the high price of skins; but if the food which went to feed the fourteen million rabbits which supplied the skins to that value (without calculating the additional numbers killed and not collected and those left to "carry on") had been feeding sheep, it does not require a financier to estimate the yearly loss which the Dominion is suffering through the rabbit pest. The question is of great national economic importance, and something needs to be done, as, although there is undoubtedly an improvement on the position as existing a few years ago, there do not appear to be sufficient indications of that future improvement so necessary if we are ever to reap permanent benefit in the direction of a greatly reduced rabbit pest. It is something to be able to hold our own against the extraordinary breeding propensities of the rabbit, but more progress than that is desired, and it is indisputable that the work of eradication has been made much more difficult owing to the high commercial value attaching to the skins.

Rabbit Boards formed in the North Island are entitled to a considerable amount of praise for the manner in which they have dealt with the matter of suppression of the rabbits within the areas controlled by them, and it is largely to their credit that the pest in the North Island has been so considerably reduced. The absence of the commercial element in the North has also been of assistance in the work of the Inspectors. I very much regret that the reports of the work of the majority of the Boards formed in the Otago-Southland District are not so satisfactory, and I regret to say that these Boards are not giving the results anticipated. Something more is wanted than merely standing between the Department in its work and the settlers. It has been clearly shown in the case of quite a number of the Boards in the North that good work is possible of fulfilment, and I am compelled to adduce from the reports received that there is not the necessary spirit shown by the members of many of the Boards in the districts mentioned.

A very considerable increase in poison materials despatched from the Department's poison-depots has taken place, principally in the North Island, the large amounts purchased by Rabbit Boards being to some extent responsible for the increase. The quantity of phosphorized pollard sent out alone amounted to 487,000 lb. (over 217 tons), besides considerable quantities of phosphorized oats, strychnine, carbon bisulphide, &c.

NOXIOUS WEEDS.

During the year the Noxious Weeds Act was amended in some important directions, one of the new provisions giving power to County Councils to declare that certain weeds—Californian thistle, ragwort, gorse, &c.—already declared to be noxious weeds within the county, shall not be noxious weeds in that county or part of the county, as the case might be, in the future, or until again redeclared weeds. A number of the counties, more especially in the South, have already taken advantage of the provision, particularly in so far as Californian thistle is concerned, and others are likely to follow. The new definition of "clear" in the amended Act allows of weeds such as blackberry and sweetbrier, which spread from the roots as well as by seed, to be dealt with by the Inspectors at any time throughout the year, and not at flowering or seeding time alone. The amendments are too recent to yet allow of any remarks as to their actual effect on the work of weed-eradication, and I will therefore not comment further on that aspect of the matter.

Blackberry is the worst of the weeds the settler and the Department have to contend with, being the most widespread and troublesome of all the plants scheduled. The class of country generally on which blackberry has obtained such a strong hold is such that control is difficult, and in some instances almost impossible. Much of the land is rough and broken and of inferior quality; and cutting and burning being the only methods of dealing with the plant, the problem is a difficult one owing to the fact that no finality is reached by these practices, and the expense becomes more than the land can carry. A considerable amount of good work has been accomplished in the eradication of weeds on arable land, where the same excuse does not exist for their presence, and every effort has been put forth to improve the condition of the rougher lands. Under this category large tracts of Native lands throughout the North Island are the worst to deal with, and Crown lands are also considerably affected. The money provided by the Lands Department for the eradication of noxious weeds on Crown