

1926.

NEW ZEALAND.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1925-26.

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

SIR,— Department of Agriculture, Wellington, 30th June, 1926.

I have the honour to forward herewith, for your Excellency's information, the report of the Department of Agriculture of the Dominion for the financial year ended 31st March last.

The agricultural year of 1925-26, although not attaining the exceptionally high all-round level of the preceding period, has given fair results. The volume of primary production was on the average fairly maintained—contraction in certain classes being offset by increases in others. The most general climatic feature was a late harsh spring, and this was followed in certain important pastoral districts by a lengthy period of exceptionally dry weather. Other districts, however, experienced favourable conditions, and the bad start of the season was very largely recovered.

In the pastoral section the year opened with a most satisfactory increase of over three-quarters of a million head of sheep, as shown in the annual returns. Moreover, the number of breeding-ewes returned was the highest on record. This promises well for further substantial recovery of the shrinkage from the peak level of the sheep-stocks recorded in 1918, and the interim returns for 1926 appear to justify these anticipations. The 1925 crop of lambs also gave an estimated increase in numbers, notwithstanding a lower lambing percentage than in the preceding year. The wool-clip produced some increase in aggregate bulk, due to the greater number of sheep shorn. Market conditions for wool were characterized by stability, in marked contrast to the fluctuations of the preceding season with its abnormally high prices, but values ruled substantially lower.

As regards the frozen-meat industry, the killings of lambs at the freezing-works of the Dominion were considerably higher than in the preceding season (the North Island being responsible), but this increase was offset by a shrinkage in mutton slaughtering. Prices ruling for freezer sheep and lambs during the season remained fairly steady, though at a level considerably lower than the record rates of 1924-25. Our wool and meat growers have therefore experienced a somewhat severe comparative shrinkage in income, consonant with what must be regarded as a more normal level of values this year. The beef output of the works showed a marked falling-off as compared with the preceding season.

Dairy cattle registered a fair increase in the 1925 statistics, and under average conditions a further advance in the output of the dairy industry might have been expected for the past season. Milk-production, however, was severely affected by