

Graziers have experienced an improved year, although the effects of the 1926 drop in sheep-values is still evident. Settlers on dry stock areas have secured little or no revenue over the past two seasons, taking into account the depreciation in prices as an offset against wool proceeds and sales of forward wethers. Prices of breeding-ewes showed a decline during February, and appear to have stabilized on a somewhat lower level, compared with last season.

The assistance of the Dominion Revaluation Board has been required in numerous cases to further review Crown charges on soldier holdings. Where good settlers are doing their utmost and still finding it difficult to meet charges the position has been again reviewed, and it cannot be said that the end is yet in sight. The fluctuations in prices render it an extremely difficult matter to stabilize land-values, and during the past two seasons the whole outlook on soldier settlement has changed.

The problems confronting the Department in connection with deteriorating areas of back-country land have a direct bearing on soldier-settlement administration. In numerous cases the farm revenue offers little margin over and above living-expenses, payment of rates, and maintenance of farm and stock, and the provisions of the Deteriorated Lands Act are being utilized whenever considered necessary. Every assistance is being given the trier, and most of the soldier settlers remaining can be now included in this classification.

Abandoned properties are difficult to dispose of in the back country, and the depreciation over even one season's unoccupancy is very great. In southern Taranaki there are practically no abandoned areas, the vacant sections being found in the grazing districts inland. During the past year twenty-one soldier properties have been vacated, and fifty farms have been disposed of.

There is a growing tendency on the part of soldier mortgagors to submit transfer proposals to the Land Board showing consideration over and above Crown charges. Invariably reductions in mortgages have previously been conceded by the Crown, and consent to the transfers is not readily available in these circumstances unless very adequate reasons are forthcoming. The speculative soldier farmer is not encouraged.

There are 434 soldiers on farm properties who have received advances secured by mortgage under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, and 498 others have obtained assistance in the purchase or erection of house properties.

The total amount outstanding on mortgage, including Current Account advances, is £1,300,741.

The total revenue received during the year amounted to £173,134 9s. 8d., and the sum of £87,770 15s. 6d. was advanced.

The position of arrears compares favourably with last year, but has been brought about mainly by concessions received through the Dominion Board and local Land Board. The amounts owing are as follows: Farm properties, £13,518 18s. 11d.; dwellings, £2,248 18s. 4d.; Current Account interest, £3,448 9s. 1d.

Applications for transfer or sublettings of house properties still continue to engage the attention of the Land Board, due in a great measure to movement of mortgagors to other centres.

Owing to serious default on payments it has been necessary to exercise powers of sale in four cases, and twelve resales have been effected.

#### WELLINGTON.

(H. W. C. MACKINTOSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

In common with his colleague the Crown tenant, the soldier settler has experienced none too profitable a year. These men are for the most part on improved and highly-priced land, and although they have not had the pioneering experiences of the settlers on bush areas they have nevertheless to farm with greater intensity to pay their way and maintain their holdings to full capacity. The fall in prices of primary products, therefore, affects the soldier settler more than the man on the cheaper ordinary Crown lands.

The wool-grower has had a fair year. Feed has been plentiful and prices for wool fair, but prices obtained for stock, especially cull stock, have been low, and reinstatement difficult. Those engaged in dairying have had a good year as far as abundance of feed and flow of milk are concerned. The price of butterfat has in many cases been disappointing and has prejudiced a promising season.

The investigation of soldiers' Current Accounts by the Dominion Revaluation Board is now practically accomplished; but the effects of the concessions granted or recommended will probably not be apparent for some time.

The amount received for the year by way of payments of interest and principal was £304,930. The amounts of loans and advances outstanding at the 31st March, 1927, were as follows: Instalment mortgages on farms, £978,917; instalment mortgages on dwellings, £1,390,083; Current Account advances, £453,873.

#### NELSON.

(A. F. WATERS, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Dairy-farmers have been hard hit by the low prices ruling for the past season, as generally there was no reserve to enable them to stand a bad season. More attention is being paid to the use of fertilizers, with very satisfactory results.

Sheep-farmers have had a fair season. The prices of wool have been good, but unfortunately there has been little demand for store sheep, and settlers have been compelled to dispose of their surplus stock at very low prices.

Orchardists have experienced a profitable year, with every indication of better market prices for their produce in future.