

APPENDIX.

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS.

NORTH AUCKLAND.

(O. N. CAMPBELL, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

In common with the civilian farmer, the soldier has had a remarkably good season as far as production was concerned; but, unfortunately, the prices of produce were much below those of last season.

The dairy-farmer fared on the whole much better than the sheep-farmer, as the extra production of butterfat, due to the good season, will about even his loss in reduced prices received.

A few of our soldier mortgagors are holding their wool in anticipation of a rise next season.

Diseases among dairy herds are still prevalent, and these cases will require special consideration.

The insistence by the Department of making the mortgagor rear for upkeep 20 per cent. of his best heifer calves, has tended to improve the herds, and has obviated the necessity of purchasing culls in the open market.

The policy of purchasing winter run-offs for soldiers located on swamp country has been of great benefit, and has not only assisted in freeing many herds from diseases, but has rendered the swamp areas free from continual pugging. The adjustment of mortgages made by the Dominion Revaluation Board has given the soldier much encouragement, and it is anticipated that there will be no retrogression as far as the mortgagor is concerned.

Very few soldiers' farms have changed hands during the year, and those which have come back on the Department's hands have found a ready sale.

The work of consolidating soldiers' mortgages is proceeding rapidly, due care being taken to see that the soldier is firmly established before any such action is taken by this office.

Recommendations covering 109 cases of transfer from current account to instalment mortgages have been approved. In fifty-three cases the whole of the old current accounts have been transferred to instalment mortgages, and in thirty-six cases portion only has been transferred, leaving the balance on current account at 6 per cent. In the remaining twenty cases there has not been sufficient equity in the land to permit of instalment mortgages being taken. The old current accounts have, therefore, in these cases been renewed.

Of cases investigated to date the amount transferred from current account to instalment mortgage is £42,090, and the balance remaining on current account at 6 per cent. is £19,494.

These adjustments have had the effect of giving the mortgagor either full or free control of his chattel assets; or, by separating the land and stock advances, has given him the incentive to repay the balance charged against his stock account.

The number of abandoned leaseholds and freeholds held by discharged soldiers under section 20 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1923, at the end of the year was nine, of an area of 3,856 acres, and valued at £8,750.

House property has not been in great demand this year, and much difficulty has been experienced in disposing of properties which have come into the hands of the Department. The shortage of houses which was apparent three or four years ago has been effectually overcome through extensive building by private contractors, and in recent years has been further diminished by the erection in and around the city of numerous flat properties.

These factors, combined with unemployment, have created a very dead market for houses. At the end of the financial year there were available for disposal sixty-seven houses. Of this number thirty-one are occupied on weekly or monthly tenancies.

AUCKLAND.

(K. M. GRAHAM, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

With few exceptions, steady progress has been made by the soldier settlers in this district during the past year, and credit is due to them for the manner in which they are handling their farms, improving their stock, and meeting their mortgage and rental liabilities to the Department.

The season has been an exceptionally good one for grass, owing to a plentiful rainfall and suitable weather conditions, and this has resulted in an increase in butterfat-production which will do much to compensate the settlers for the low prices now ruling for that commodity.

Ragwort has, unfortunately, proved to be a serious menace on many of the small farms in certain localities, and in certain instances it has been necessary to reduce herds to a minimum and stock up with sheep to control and eradicate this pest. In cases such as these, further advances on current account have been made, to enable the settlers to recondition and improve their fences and subdivide their holdings into smaller paddocks. Where the settler has co-operated loyally with the Department in its endeavour to assist him on these lines, it is evident that the set-back due to the reduction of the herd will be of a temporary nature, and, with good management, satisfactory results and increased production will again soon be achieved.

The drop in the price of wool and in the value of sheep has adversely affected this season's returns from grazing; but as the majority of soldier settlers are engaged in dairying the effect of this slump has not been felt in this district to the same extent as elsewhere.