

TARANAKI.

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

Generally speaking, sheep-farming during the past year has been on a payable basis. The exporting prices for fat lambs, wethers, &c., have been very good, and this has been reflected in the prices for store sheep, particularly breeding ewes. Wool prices dropped considerably from the previous year's level, but even with the lower price for wool it is considered that the sheep-farmers have had a good year and most of them should be able to meet annual charges. Unfortunately prices for butterfat still remain low, and the average dairy-farmer is not making sufficient to pay charges and carry on. It is pleasing to note that in some districts more attention is now given to the rearing of pigs, but there is still plenty of room for improvement in this productive side-line.

The year has been an unusual one from a climatic point of view. The winter temperatures were about on the average and there was plenty of rain. A violent storm in October did considerable damage in central Taranaki. Heavy snowfalls round Mount Egmont occurred in September and practically isolated the accommodation houses for some days. The summer was long and unusually hot and, while it was marked by partial drought conditions, the butterfat production fell only slightly. Owing to sufficient rains and heavy dews the pastures maintained their freshness practically throughout, although in the south conditions were not so favourable as in the northern area. In February a tremendous fall of rain caused widespread damage to roads, railways, and farms, the fall in New Plymouth being a record one of 7.29 in. in twenty-four hours. Unfortunately further falls of rain in March did considerable harm where repairs to the February flood damage had not been completed or consolidated. The ample rainfalls in the autumn left the district with its pastures in good condition to start the winter, and there should be an abundance of good feed.

The wool-clip was an average one, and most of the wool was in good condition. The lambing percentage was about normal. Apart from one or two isolated cases of abortion, there has been an absence of serious attacks of disease among stock, although ragwort, as usual, takes heavy toll of cattle. Stock generally should start the winter in good condition. Root crops have not done well owing to the dry spell and also to the white butterfly, but a good deal of hay and ensilage has been provided for winter feed. Unfortunately in some parts, owing to ragwort, it is practically impossible to close up pastures for hay. It is pleasing to note many instances where settlers are going in for purely grassland farming, and there seems no reason why this method should not be extended. It means, of course, ample supplies of fertilizers, but farmers are now alive to this necessity and, as far as finances permit, manures are well provided for.

Reports indicate that ragwort is decreasing a little in the central and southern areas, but is still very bad in the north, and it seems apparent that the menace will not be checked until sheep only are run on the sections. Too much dairying is undertaken on land entirely unsuitable, with the result that half the farm is worked and the balance surrendered to ragwort.

It is very gratifying to again report a decided increase in the revenue received for the year, the increase over the last year's figures being about £12,000, or over 30 per cent.

WELLINGTON.

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

There was a fair inquiry for land during the year, but, for the most part, the areas offering were not of that quality that would entice a man with money to adventure his capital, more especially at the present time when markets are so unsteady. Land of good quality is in demand, and any areas offered that would show an immediate return were readily selected.

A good winter and spring were generally experienced by both dairy and pastoral farmers, and stock came through in very fair condition. In the northern portion of the district climatic conditions throughout the year were congenial to all classes of stock, and the good spell of dry weather enabled good progress to be made with burning and resowing of areas affected with fern and second growth. Top-dressing has increased despite the low prices ruling for produce, and settlers are now realizing that it is essential that manures be applied if deterioration of pastures is to be prevented. Prices for stock have shown a rising tendency that does not seem to be warranted when values of wool and mutton are reviewed. Farmers have availed themselves of 4B and other Unemployment Board Schemes to advantage.

In the southern half of the district there was a good spring, but early in the summer a dry, hot spell commenced, which lasted well on towards the end of the year under review. The result was disastrous to the majority of the dairy-farmers. Pastures dried up, and, in some parts of the district, supplementary feed required for the winter was fed out early.

Prices for butterfat are about the same as last year, but the output will be less on account of the long period of dry weather experienced during the summer. Wool prices have been disappointing and the advantage gained last year by pastoralists has not been maintained. Stock prices, however, reached a high level and compensated somewhat for the low prices obtained for wool.

In some parts of the district the white butterfly and aphids are still bad, and crops of soft turnips, chou-moellier, &c., sown for autumn feeding have been practically ruined. In the Wairarapa advantage has been taken to a considerable extent of the 4B Unemployment Board Scheme and many areas have been improved that otherwise would have remained in a neglected state.

Speaking generally, apart from the sharp rise in stock prices, the tenants have had only a fair year.

In spite of low price-levels it is pleasing to be able to report that the revenue for this district shows an increase of slightly over £70,000 compared with the figures for last year.