

## PASTURES AND CROPS.

MARCH.

OFFICERS of the Fields and Experimental Farms Division of the Department report as follows on the condition of the pastures and crops during the past month :—

**BAY OF ISLANDS.**—The severe drought which has prevailed here since the middle of October still continues and is growing more serious to farmers every day. The oldest settlers assert that the present is the severest drought they have ever experienced, and numbers of large creeks have gone completely dry, a condition of things unknown before. It has had very disastrous effects upon all the lucerne experiments being carried out in this district. This is very disappointing, both from the settlers' and the Department's point of view, as they are the first trials of this splendid forage plant in the northern peninsula. The much-prized grass (*Paspalum dilatatum*) of the north has had a good opportunity to assert itself as a drought-resister. It is showing a splendid growth on the rich heavy soils of the Kaitaia district, and is a cheerful relief to the eye after viewing the parched areas of volcanic land in the Bay of Islands County. Fires were rampant during the month, and settlers had a very anxious time in fighting against the withering flames and saving their homesteads and fences from destruction. In many cases their efforts were in vain. Stock are now beginning to show the evil effects of the prolonged dryness, and the outlook for winter is very discouraging indeed. As a result prices at the live-stock sales are considerably lower than they have been for some time. Owing to the very low supply of cream, the local butter-factory proposes to cease operations at the end of the month, but farmers have not had large cheques this season to gladden their hearts.—*W. J. Dunlop.*

**WHANGAREI.**—The drought still continues, and many of the streams are beginning to run dry. Pastures are bare, and the only green vegetation to be seen is where paspalum is growing. The whole country is more or less fire-swept, and unless rain comes at once there will be a big mortality among stock. Most of the maize crop is a failure.—*A. P. Speedy.*

**AUCKLAND.**—The month opened with fine weather, followed by light showers at intervals; then warmer weather prevailed up till the 11th and 12th instant, when rain set in again. The moisture quite revived the pastures and gave an exceptional growth of grass all over the districts, green crops also benefiting by the rains. Then dry weather set in again and continued up to the 29th instant, when a change took place, followed by a constant downpour all day, which will do an immense amount of good to the pastures and forage crops, which were robbed of their green foliage by the drought. There is sufficient moisture now to nourish plant-life. I think there is nothing to fear, and there will be an abundance of feed to carry all descriptions of stock through the winter and the spring months. No doubt the dry spell of weather seriously affected the milk-supply for the city, and dairy factories as well; but stock did not suffer much, on account of the farmers having a plentiful supply of hay, maize, and other green food which were given them liberally, and kept them in the pink of condition, especially dairy cows. The bush settlers are the only ones who have not grumbled at the dry weather. They had large areas of felled bush waiting to be burnt off. I notice they, with few exceptions, got good burns. Now that the rains have set in there will be large areas ready for surface sowing at once. The turnip crops and autumn-sown potatoes are looking well.—*R. Rouan.*

**OPOTIKI.**—The weather during the early part of last month was very dry, but nice mild rain fell on the 11th and 12th. This was badly needed. Pastures are now looking well, and there will be plenty of feed throughout the district to commence the winter with. Early-sown maize is looking well, but that planted later has not done so well on account of the dry season.—*John Case.*