PASTURES AND CROPS.

APRIL.

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 disastrous drought continues, this now being the seventh month since any appreciable rain has fallen. The troubles of the drought were supplemented by several severe frosts, which chilled the air and cut down all sorts of vegetation, on the nights of the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th. Since those dates the nights generally have been very much colder than is usual at this time of year, and farmers have found it necessary to cover their horses at night, even in this "congenial" northern climate. These severe frosts have caused farmers and stockowners to become very despondent. The winter outlook has never presented more discouraging prospects, as the number of stock in the north is greater, and fodder and grass is more scarce. Consequently farmers have found it necessary to sell a lot of their stock at a sacrifice. Fires are still raging in some localities and destroying the remainder of the already parched pastures, and many acres of useful bush, which farmers have hitherto depended on to a considerable extent to help them over the winter as places providing rough feed and a refuge from the bitter wintry winds. Stock of all kinds are showing signs of impoverishment and sickness in many localities. A good many losses have been reported, and one small farmer has lost nine head of his young heifers, due to eating the young shoots of fern which have sprung up since the bush-fires. Others again have met their fate by getting into many of th swamps after a more verdant forage, and, being in a weak state, have been unable to struggle back to dry land. Farmers are becoming resigned to the gloomy prospects which the North has never experienced in the past, and most of them realize the value a good ensilage-stack or a good stack of hay would be at this juncture. It is on these occasions that the far-famed paspalum can prove its worth as a drought-resister, especially on those rich alluvial flats that are found in many valleys of the North. A slight rain fell yesterday, but quite insufficient to meet the demand of the baked-up soils.—*W. J. Dunlop.*

WHANGAREI.—On the 7th and 8th of the month we had two severe frosts. The drought continued until the 26th, when warm rains fell till the 27th ; in all, the rainfall amounted to a little over 2 in. This rainfall has given the pastures a fresh start, and, should warm weather continue, with a little more rain, it means an abundance of grass well into the winter. This has been the driest season in the North for many years, and the rain means a matter of thousands of pounds to this part of the Dominion. There has been a big loss throughout the district from bush-fires, and most of the settlers having sown grass-seed too early, in the majority of cases this has been a total failure. The only grass the drought did not affect in the slightest was paspalum ; this continued to grow until the frosts came, and then the growth practically ceased.—*A. P. Speedy.*

AUCKLAND.—Fine warm weather continued up till the afternoon of the 3rd instant, and then a change took place, rain falling on and off at intervals up to the 7th, when it turned very cold and windy, after which a few fine days followed. On the 14th heavy rain set in again, which was much appreciated after the spell of dry weather. However, the rainfall did not last long enough, and was not sufficiently heavy to saturate the ground thoroughly. From the 15th to the 24th it kept fine, but very cold and frosty nights were experienced, which greatly affected the growth of everything. The dairying industry suffered from the effects of the dry weather through this cause. There was a considerable shortage of milk, somewhat greater than usual for this time of year. Considering the shortage of feed, stock of all descriptions are in fairly good condition. The green crops in most places are very good, and the rain now setting in again will give them a fresh life. The growing crops of potatoes that looked promising last month suffered considerably from the effects of the frosts. Judging from reports they are practically ruined.—*R. Rowan.*