



## Ruakura's Fifth Conference and Field Day

EVER since the Department of Agriculture's Ruakura Animal Research Station, near Hamilton, was established in 1939, farmers have shown an increasing interest in the work of the Station. From the end of the war the number of farmers wanting to visit the Station reached such proportions that research work was being seriously hindered by the demand on research workers to "drop tools" and explain what had been done and what work was in progress. In the words of the Superintendent of the Station, Dr. C. P. McMeekan: "If this goes on, we soon won't have anything to tell them".

TO overcome this difficulty it was decided to set aside one week in each year during which the efforts of the staff are devoted to holding an annual conference for farmers at a time of the year when most farmers would be able to attend. It was proposed to discuss at the conference the work of the Station in particular and of the Animal Research Division in general. In addition, other prominent agriculturists who had something of value to tell farmers would be invited to participate. So the first Ruakura Farmers' Conference was held in 1949. Each conference has been organised to cover the interests of both sheep and dairy farmers, one day being set aside for sheep farmers only, two days (including a field day at the Station) for both sheep and dairy farmers, and the final day for dairy farmers only.

From a relatively modest beginning at the first conference in 1949, when some 300 farmers attended, the interest has increased each year. Each conference has covered an ever-widening field. More and more farmers have attended. They have entered into discussion and argument to an increasing and stimulating degree.

The conference of this year was rated the best ever by enthusiasts who

have attended all five. It attracted a record crowd; from 350 to 400 sheep farmers and 500 to 750 dairy farmers attended the day and evening meetings; at the field day there was a representative gathering which has been conservatively estimated at 1300. Though most came from the Auckland Province, practically every other part

of New Zealand was represented. Visitors came from as far afield as Southland and Poverty Bay.

### Increased Sheep Farmer Interest

A particularly pleasing feature was the marked increase in the numbers of sheep farmers over those of past years. The Waikato does not normally rank in popular opinion as a sheep-farming area, and the name of Ruakura is more commonly associated in farmers' minds with dairy cattle. The increasing contributions of the Station workers to problems of the sheep industry, however, are being recognised. The development of Ruakura's new Hill Country Research Station on the Raglan hills has probably contributed to this situation. Whatever the cause, the fact that the conference resulted in probably the largest gathering of sheep farmers ever held in New Zealand for educational purposes augurs well for the future of this class of farming.

The organisation of a successful conference of this type is not easy. The staff of Ruakura received many congratulations on the very good job done. In particular, farmers were impressed with the way in which the field day was handled. Anyone who has attended a farm demonstration at

Papers and discussions at this year's Ruakura Farmers' Conference Week are being printed as

"Proceedings of the Ruakura Farmers' Conference Week 1953":

Price 10s., post free.

Those who paid conference fees will automatically be sent a copy. Others may order from the Department of Agriculture, Box 2298, Wellington.

Copies of the "Proceedings" for 1950, 1951, and 1952 are still obtainable, price 10s., post free.

**HEADING PHOTOGRAPH:** Although nearly a thousand dairy farmers attended the field day, there were seldom more than 30 or 40 at each of the major demonstration points. Continuous lunch at a mobile milk bar allowed each group time off for discussion.