

The importance of fodder crops is realized as being necessary for wintering and fattening stock, and the Board has encouraged the growing of other farm produce to meet the demands of the Dominion during the present state of emergency. Linen flax was grown on an increased area in the Marlborough District, a total of 178 acres being planted, but owing to unfavourable weather conditions the yield per acre for this season is not as good as that obtained for the previous year. In the Bay of Plenty and East Coast districts considerable areas were again planted in maize, and efforts will be made to grow potatoes and other vegetable crops to meet the demand created by war conditions. Fodder crops have been grown to a greater extent during the past season; it is estimated that a total area of 2,000 acres of swedes were sown, and areas aggregating approximately 3,200 acres were cut for hay and ensilage.

The control of noxious weeds, especially ragwort, has presented a difficult problem on dairy-farms owing to the short supply of Atlacide and sodium chlorate. Goats are being used extensively for the purpose of controlling blackberry growth, but shortage of labour has retarded the work of gorse-eradication. In some districts, notably Taumarunui and Tokaanu, the rabbit pest appears to be increasing, and more drastic steps will need to be taken to combat this nuisance. In Southland the rabbits are a serious menace to farming operations, but all possible means to destroy this pest are being taken.

Grants from the Consolidated Fund made available through the Department during the year under review amounted to £247,500 and were the means of enabling the Board to profitably employ some 2,000 Maoris on productive work on Native lands or on Native housing construction. In cases where returns from farming operations were found to be insufficient to maintain a reasonable standard of living the Board has provided assistance to settlers during the winter months by way of subsidized contracts.

The Ahuwhenua Cup, presented by the Right Hon. Viscount Bledisloe as a challenge trophy for competition by Native settlers on land-development schemes, was awarded this year to a member of the Maniapoto tribe who is farming at Te Kuiti. Each year there is keen contest for the trophy, and in complimenting the winner upon his well-kept farm and efficient management the judge commented favourably on the high standard of farming efficiency shown by all nine competitors.

The shortage of and restrictions on building-materials and the demand for skilled carpenters and other tradesmen for defence works has curtailed the Board's housing activities during the year, and the increased costs of construction is also a factor which is retarding the provision of suitable dwellings. Nevertheless fair progress has been recorded, and the number of houses erected, purchased, or repaired during 1941-42, including those built for settlers on farm-development schemes, was 156, classified as follows: Under development and settlement schemes, 54; under the Housing Act, 53; and under the Special Housing Fund established for indigent Natives, 49. The total number of cottages and other dwellings erected or repaired for Maoris up to the 31st March, 1942, was 2,258, and in addition a large number of farm buildings have been provided for Native settlers on the land.

Much remains to be done to alleviate the housing conditions of many of the Maori people who are still living in deplorable circumstances which exist in scattered Native communities throughout the country, but war conditions are at present precluding expansion of activities. Comprehensive measures to ameliorate the position must be considered in conjunction with the rehabilitation of Maori soldiers as they return. It is gratifying to note from reports that better housing conditions soon reflect themselves in the improved health of the occupants, particularly of the children, and the Board trusts that the measures already taken will prove an incentive to the people to strive for higher standards in this direction.

The development of new areas has been completely curtailed during the year owing primarily to the supply of fertilizers being reduced and also to the dearth of man-power available. It will, in fact, be impossible to maintain pastures on marginal lands to the full extent possible under previous conditions, and if the quota of artificial manures available for future requirements is less than that received for the past season a drop in production is inevitable. The immediate concern of the Board is to maintain lands already in pasture.

In addition to directing the farming operations of the Native Trustee and the Maori Land Boards which embrace seventeen sheep-stations aggregating 67,659 acres, in respect of which advances amounting to £196,000 have been made, the Board controls the investments on mortgage or overdraft of these statutory bodies. At the 31st March, 1942, the investments of the Native Trustee amounted to £590,000, including £391,000 on mortgage securities to 372 Natives, £164,000 on overdraft to stations, and £5,000 held in local-body debentures. The corresponding figures for the seven Maori Land Boards at the same date were: Total investments, £603,000, including £153,500 by way of loans to 253 Maori mortgagors; £80,000 advances on properties since included in development schemes; and £105,000 held in Government securities. Throughout the year the Board continued its policy of encouraging the application of surplus Trust funds towards assistance to Maoris for farming and housing purposes.

The Board takes this opportunity of again paying tribute to men of the Maori battalions and other units, many of whom were engaged on Board-controlled lands and are now serving with the armed forces overseas or in New Zealand. The deepest sympathy is extended to the relatives of those who have made the supreme sacrifice, and the Board trusts that favourable reports will be received of the wounded, missing, and prisoners of war, and that men invalided home will soon regain their normal health. In the stupendous task of rehabilitation after the war it will be the Board's duty to assist, and it feels assured that in this important work it will have the fullest co-operation of the leaders of the Maori people.

In conclusion, the Board desires once again to record its appreciation of the devoted services rendered by officers of the Native Department, which, with a depleted staff caused by the release of many younger men for overseas and defence purposes, has efficiently carried out the Board's policy of maintaining production and contributing fully to the Dominion's war effort.

Accompanying this statement are district reports reviewing the various agricultural and pastoral schemes, farms, and other activities controlled by the Board, and tables are appended containing statistical and financial information concerning all its operations.

H. G. R. MASON, for the Chairman.