

LAND DEVELOPMENT.

SMALL FARMS ACT, 1932-33, AND LAND LAWS AMENDMENT ACT, 1929.

General.

During the year ended 31st March, 1943, the major operations of the Land Settlement Board were confined more to the maintenance and farming of the blocks under their control than to the further development of new country or the completion of new improvements. The supply position, which earlier forced a decision to curtail new development work has not improved to any extent, and consequently operations must be confined to those for which material and labour are available. In view of this shortage of material and labour, it has not been possible on some properties to take full advantage of previous capital expenditure on improvements.

Although new development work has been curtailed to a minimum, it is neither wise nor, in some cases, possible to cease new work entirely. An instance of the need to continue with a restricted programme is apparent on partly-developed blocks, where it is inadvisable to break up recently-established permanent pastures for the annual swede crop, and it is far better to cultivate new country, which, following the crop, must be sown to permanent pasture.

In addition to the areas that have already been purchased for subdivision for the settlement of ex-servicemen, there are many blocks which have been developed which could be made available for settlement if supplies in the way of fertilizer, fencing-wire, piping, and building-materials were available.

Owing to the necessity for the early preparation of this report it has not been possible to include financial figures and other statistical data showing the position of the various blocks as at 31st March, 1943. Comprehensive schedules giving particulars as to expenditure, area under development, stock carried, and other details in respect of each block as at 31st March, 1942, were published in last year's annual report. The general position in respect to operations on the development blocks in the various districts is as follows:—

Control: Superintendent of Land Development, Auckland.—The lands under development in this district comprise fifteen blocks totalling 73,500 acres. One small block of partly-improved dairy land was purchased during the year. Operations were again confined to those for which material and labour were available.

Farming returns showed a steady increase over those for the previous year, mainly due to the fact that pastures sown previously were approaching maturity.

Further endeavours were made to improve the quality of stock being run by purchasing good foundation breeding-ewes and rams, breeding-cows and bulls, and already this policy is bearing fruit in increased wool returns and better prices for fat stock.

On some of these areas which have only been developed in the last few years, grazing has been confined solely to cattle, but, with consolidation and the establishment of a better sole of grass, arrangements were made to establish limited ewe flocks.

A particularly dry summer was experienced north of Auckland, and this, coupled with the general difficulty attending the supply of good natural water in this district, affected production.

In the Rotorua and Bay of Plenty districts, where the rains were ample, the effect of the reduced rate of top-dressing has not become apparent, and it has been possible, by careful planning, to conserve manure-supplies. The labour available from the National Service Department's camp on the Mihi Block has been of much assistance, but here again shortage of material has handicapped progress.

On the Galatea Estate favourable weather conditions promoted good pasture growth, and the dairy and station returns were maintained at a satisfactory level.

One new dairy herd was established, the total number of cows milked being 1,130 in fifteen herds.

No new development work was carried out during the year, work being confined to farming operations, including the provision of swedes, hay, top-dressing, and drain and fence maintenance.

At the end of the year a small party of defaulters were moved from Strathmore to undertake building maintenance, road and culvert repairs, and the prevention of river erosion.

An outbreak of facial eczema was recently reported from this area, but the extent of the outbreak is not yet known.

Control: Superintendent of Land Development, Te Kuiti.—The blocks under the Superintendent's control number thirty-seven, while the area remaining after allowing for certain alienations and some minor increases is approximately 66,700 acres.

With the exception of the blocks at Ohakune and Raetihi, the control of fern and ragwort has again been exacting, but, generally speaking, the Supervisors and Farm-managers have done excellent work in this respect.

The curtailment of supplies of superphosphate has not yet shown any need to reduce the numbers of stock being carried. Where (as is the case on most of the blocks in this district) hand top-dressing of hill country has to be resorted to, it is questionable whether a shortage of competent men to carry out this work will not be a greater factor in the reduction of manure sown than will be the allocation.

The number of employees engaged on the thirty-seven blocks has been greatly reduced during the year, and those now employed total only one hundred and fifty.

Dairy returns from the sixteen herds have remained over all consistent with those of last season, while lambing and calving percentages in the run stock have remained about the same.

While it has still been necessary to purchase wethers for control work, the past year has seen the blocks, for the first time, self-supporting in cattle.