

The gross expenditure of public moneys for the year under review on the agricultural and pastoral schemes controlled by the Board was £648,328 (compared with £766,838 for the previous year), the finance for which was provided from the following sources: Farming receipts, £534,976; grants from the Consolidated Fund towards labour subsidies, £132,503. The year's working thus resulted in a surplus of £19,151 without recourse to new loan-moneys, and after meeting £114,172 in interest charges.

Due partly to the continued enlistment of Maoris of military age for service with the armed forces, and to some extent to the lucrative rates of pay at present being offered in outside industries, the average number of men employed on Board-controlled properties declined from 2,000 to some 1,000 during the year under review. Grants from the Consolidated Fund amounting to £132,500 were the means of enabling the Board to subsidize the work on marginal lands and maintain production on properties not fully developed, and in cases where returns from farming operations were found to be insufficient to provide a reasonable standard of living the Board has provided assistance to settlers during the winter months by way of labour subsidies, with the main object of increasing the productivity of their holdings. The Board appreciates the work of the district tribal committees and their executives, which are an integral part of the Maori war effort organization, in directing settlers not eligible for military service to remain on their farms and to devote their energies towards increased production.

The Government has recently decided that more vigorous measures shall be taken to develop and extend horticulture amongst the Maoris, and arrangements are in train for the appointment of an expert to the Native Department for the purpose of controlling this activity. As a commercial enterprise, the establishment of suitable men as market-gardeners on selected areas which cannot be profitably utilized for dairying should provide opportunities both for the occupier and his family, and the development of horticulture for domestic purposes will materially improve the living-conditions of the people. The Board welcomes the extension of agricultural pursuits among the Maoris, and where there is reasonable security, is prepared to consider advances to meet the cost of fencing and cultivation and the purchase of seed and manure.

It is expected that much of the work in connection with the repatriation of returned Maori servicemen will be delegated to the Native Department. Provided the necessary finance is made available, the Department is properly equipped to undertake the responsibility of finding employment for discharged soldiers on Board-controlled properties, establishing suitable men as settlers on tribal and other lands, and providing homes and financial assistance for Maoris who have served with the armed forces, and for servicemen's widows. Pending the appointment of some administrative authority in accordance with the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, 1941, the Board of Native Affairs has approved advances under the Native Housing Act for dwellings in appropriate cases, and is investigating any applications which have been referred, and is arranging for inspections of Native lands suitable for soldier settlement.

The transfer of skilled tradesmen to defence construction works, the scarcity of and restrictions on building-materials, and the general demands on man-power for war purposes have seriously curtailed the Board's housing activities during the year, but nevertheless some progress is recorded. Some 49 houses were erected, purchased, or repaired under the provision of the Native Housing Act, while on the farm development and settlement schemes 32 dwellings were completed and 15 were renovated. The total number of cottages and other dwellings erected or renovated for Maoris up to the 31st March, 1943, was 2,354, and a large number of farm buildings have been provided for Native settlers on the land. The Board is fully seized of the need for improving the living-conditions of the Maori people, and trusts that more vigorous measures in this direction may be possible as the war position improves.

This year the Ahuwhenua Trophy, presented by the Right Hon. Viscount Bledisloe for annual competition among Maori settlers on land-development schemes, was awarded to a member of the Ngati-Kahungunu tribe engaged in dairy-farming at Horohoro, near Rotorua. In awarding points for pasture control, stock husbandry, volume of production, conservation of winter-feed, condition of fences, cleanliness of sheds and equipment, and general farm management, the judge congratulated the winner on his initiative, and complimented the seven contestants on their farming efficiency.

The investments of the Native Trustee and the seven Maori Land Boards are controlled by the Board and are in a sound position. At the 31st March last the funds invested by the Native Trustee amounted to £648,000, including £398,000 on mortgage securities to 375 Natives, £168,000 on overdraft to stations and other properties being farmed, £8,000 held in Government stock and local-body debentures, and £55,000 deposits at short call. The corresponding figures for the Maori Land Boards at the same date were: Total investments, £653,000, including £152,000 by way of loans to 252 Maori mortgagors; £80,000 advances on properties since included in development schemes; £107,000 in war-loan stock; and £52,000 in other Government securities.

The Board takes this opportunity of paying homage to members of the Maori race who are serving with the armed forces overseas or in New Zealand. The Board extends its sympathy to the bereaved relatives of the fallen, and trusts that favourable reports will be received of others who have become casualties or prisoners of war, and that men invalided home will be speedily restored to normal health.

In conclusion, the Board again acknowledges the zealous services of all officers of the Native Department, who, in carrying out the Board's policy of maintaining production, have contributed materially to the Dominion's war effort.

Accompanying this statement are district reports on the various farming and land-development activities controlled by the Board, and tables are appended containing statistical and financial information concerning all its operations.

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