

FIELDS DIVISION

REPORT OF J. W. WOODCOCK, ACTING-DIRECTOR

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

Weather conditions were somewhat abnormal during the season under review. In general, the winter was extremely mild, the spring was cold and backward, while the summer was mainly fine and warm. In the Auckland Province the mild winter alleviated to a considerable extent the acute stock-feed position which had developed during the previous autumn. In spring, however, cold spells and late frosts continued up till the end of December. The summer was dry and hot, but good rains during March prevented serious drought conditions again developing. Almost similar conditions prevailed in the southern portion of the North Island, except that in spring the east coast had exceptionally dry weather in contrast to the very wet and cold spring in Taranaki and on the west coast. But in the Wellington Province generally favourable weather was experienced in summer and autumn. In the South Island, except in Westland and Nelson, unusually heavy rainfall was experienced in most districts during autumn and winter, although the latter was milder than usual. The heavy autumn rain in the arable districts interfered with the sowing of autumn wheat, and as Canterbury again experienced wet conditions in spring, crop-sowing activities were again made difficult. A moist, cool summer in that area and a relative freedom from drying north-west winds were favourable to the growth of crops. Harvesting was almost a month later than usual. On the west coast and in Nelson the autumn of 1946 was mild and fine, the winter was wet and cold, while the summer in both these districts, as well as in Marlborough, was dry. In the coastal districts of Otago the season was marked by an unusually high winter and spring rainfall and by cold conditions from spring to early summer. In Central Otago and in Southland dry conditions and heavy frosts were experienced in winter, while cold rainy periods later seriously retarded work on the land and checked pasture growth, resulting in one of the worst springs experienced by farmers for many years. Dry weather set in during January, and the season closed under almost drought conditions in these districts.

EXTENSION SERVICE

The agricultural extension service is the main activity of the Fields Division, and this is carried out by personal visits to farms, lectures, demonstrations, radio broadcasts, articles in newspapers and the *Journal of Agriculture*, and correspondence on cropping, pasture establishment and management, use of fertilizers and lime, feeding of live-stock, land-improvement, and farm-management in all its phases. This important part of the Division's activities is being increased as further trained staff becomes available, and a number of returned servicemen are taking special courses at the two agricultural colleges to fit them for this work. Experience in the past has shown that the best results are obtained by decentralization of the instructional staff, locating the officers at all the important country centres so that their services may be more readily available to the farming community. This policy is being pursued as circumstances and staff permit, and ultimately it is hoped to have officers stationed at sixty centres, as compared with the thirty-seven instructorates now existent.

PASTURES

The season was generally a good one for pastures, chiefly because of the good autumn rainfall and mild winter with a relative freedom from long dry