

Production figures for the Rangitaiki Plains district for the year ended 31st March, 1949, are not yet available, but for the year ended 31st March, 1947, 4,873 tons of butter were manufactured and for the year ended 31st March, 1948, a peak figure of 5,307 tons was produced.

It has been evident for some time that to maintain production from the land in this district the present drainage system must be developed and extended by further capital work in those areas where subsidence of the peat land is causing drainage difficulties. A drainage-improvement scheme covering that part of the district which lies between the Whakatane and Rangitaiki Rivers has been prepared and submitted for consideration by the ratepayers. Discussions have also taken place with ratepayers concerning the installation of a community pumping scheme in the old Rangitaiki Channel area.

Arrears of maintenance-work are being overtaken with the aid of additional plant. Essential channel maintenance carried out during the year included an unusual amount of widening and deepening drains where their efficiency has been reduced by subsidence of the land. The flattening of the grade in the lower channels has been responsible for increased deposits of sand and silt, which must be removed, particularly where hill-water is carried by the drains. This work has been carried out with drag-line excavators, and five of these machines have been employed during the year. For part of the year the old re-erected Monaghan excavator has made the sixth machine. There have been varying periods when the excavators have been held up for repairs. The length of time in each case has been dependent on delivery of spares. The total length of drains and canals on which the removal of silt and deepening was carried out during the year by drag-line excavators amounted to approximately sixteen miles, and in this length over 96,000 cubic yards of material was removed from the drains.

Each year it becomes more difficult to let contracts for the cleaning of drains by hand-labour. This year the length of drains cleaned by the use of a tyne drag on a drag-line excavator has been increased by over four miles, an increase of one-third over last year's figure. A continuous battle has been waged against the rapid growth of aquatic weeds. The results of special efforts to control the growth of water hyacinth, which had spread with phenomenal speed in the Orini Canal, may, from present indications, be only a reduction in the rate of increase of the infected area. However, experiments carried out with the assistance of a field officer of the Department of Agriculture, have produced a chemical preparation which has given some encouraging results, and investigations are being continued.

This year an abnormal number of small washouts and slips occurred along the banks of the Rangitaiki River. These appear to have been due to the usual winter rises in the river following a very dry summer. In most of these cases rebattering and easing of the bends was carried out with a drag-line excavator, and where necessary the stop-bank was moved back and topped up. Below Thornton Bridge 15 chains of the left bank of the Rangitaiki River was battered and fascined, willows were planted, and the berm was widened by setting back the stop-bank. Some work of a more substantial nature was carried out on the left bank below Edgecumbe at two bends on the outskirts of the settlement where the river passed through an established residential area. At the two affected areas the bank was rebattered and heavily reveted with stone. A total length of 15 chains was protected in this way. It was expected that during the past year an attempt would be made to re-establish the direct approach of the Rangitaiki River to the sea by cutting through the sand-spit which has formed with the easterly movement of the mouth, but owing to unsuitable conditions the work was postponed. As mentioned earlier, a bad breach occurred in the left bank of the Tarawera River about one mile above the railway bridge. Here the normal river-water is about 4 ft.