

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 25th April, 1913.

I beg to submit herewith my report on the work of the Department in this district for the year ending the 31st March, 1913.

GENERAL.

The year just closed has been marked by steady progress throughout the Southland district.

In the towns business has been good, and few instances can be recorded where increased trade and brighter prospects have not been the order. Improvements in buildings, streets, and other public services have been carried out. In Invercargill the electric-car service is an accomplished fact, and the patronage accorded has surpassed anticipations.

The farming community, especially those on the flat country, experienced two disastrous floods in the growing season. In the early spring acres of young grain were washed away. Considerable areas were sown again, and the late harvest was on the fair road to completion when another flood, more extensive and disastrous than its predecessors, swept stooks, stacks, and sacks of threshed grain right out of existence. Besides the loss of crops, numbers of sheep, cattle, and horses were carried away, while the amount of fencing destroyed ran into hundreds of miles. Probably pastoralists were less unfortunate than the agriculturalists as the country generally devoted to grazing is of a nature not easily flooded. They had cold wet weather, however, to contend with in the early spring, just at the time when young lambs were beginning to make their appearance. Profiting by their experiences of former years, many pastoralists have now provided shelter plantations for their ewes, and have thus minimized the danger of loss through sudden storms. The shearing was put through in good time, and the clip reached the stores in prime condition. Prices received were quite up to the expectations of growers; a good clearance was effected, and as a result a considerable sum of money was put into circulation. Lambs came away well at the start, but had several checks during the growing season, and did not reach the freezing stage quite as early as expected. The first batches to come forward, however, were in good condition, and should prove profitable to the growers. At all times during the season there has been abundance of feed, the growth of clover being almost phenomenal. Winter feed is plentiful, and in consequence there should be no difficulty in carrying stock through the winter. Ground is still being brought into cultivation for agricultural purposes, and in the coming season there should be a considerable extent of country bearing its first cultivated crop. Noxious weeds have called for a good deal of attention, as, on account of the moist season, the growth, especially on new ground, has been vigorous. It is satisfactory to note that the much-dreaded Californian thistle shows signs of dying out; everywhere the growth is more stunted than usual, and the plants do not appear to be maturing their seeds to any great extent. The demand for farm labourers has been quite as keen as in former years, but our young men do not seem to take kindly to the occupation.

Dairying: The dairying industry is growing, and each year sees the number of factories increase; every small district will no doubt have its own factory eventually. The total quantity of cheese shipped from the Bluff for the year ending the 31st March, 1913, was 111,750 cwt., valued at £313,569. After adding to this the quantity consumed locally as well as that transhipped from other ports, £500,000 would seem a reasonable estimate to put down as the total value of the cheese output for the above period. As butter-making and milk-condensing form strong branches of the dairy industry in this district, they must be considered when speaking of dairying generally. Although it would be a difficult matter to obtain actual figures showing the value of butter manufactured locally, the amount must run into five figures. The manufacture of butter from whey is the latest development of the dairying business, and plants have been installed for the purpose in some of the larger factories, where a very high-class article has been turned out. The success of the experiment in using whey is being closely watched, and within a very few years every factory in the district will, it is expected, have made arrangements for obtaining a "second crop" from its milk. That milk-condensing is carried on in this district on a most extensive scale may be gathered from the following figures, which speak for themselves: Milk treated, 1,012,196 gallons, valued at £25,000. The dairy-farmers are also gradually improving their herds.

A good deal has been done in the way of cow-testing, which is a sure sign that the farmers are taking a scientific interest in their business. With the opening of the bush lands, the number of dairy-farmers will increase, and the demand for new factories must therefore continue. Though the past season has been somewhat erratic, the supplies of milk have been fairly steady, and the factories, on the whole, have done well.

Sawmilling: Owing to the falling-off in building operations the demand for timber has not been so keen as in the past few years, but, nevertheless, the mills have been kept going, and continue to employ large numbers of men. Bush areas within reasonable distance of the town are now few and far between, and each year sees the mills pushed farther out, until, within a very short time, a sawmill will be a novelty to town dwellers.

Flax-milling: A sudden rise in the price of fibre towards the end of the year 1912 caused activity in the industry, and practically every mill in the district was put in commission as soon as men could be found to fill the places. The season was not favourable, however, for drying and bleaching the fibre, and the paddocks soon got overloaded with wet material, consequently a good deal of time was lost, and the scutches were lying idle. Men were hard to procure at the start, but later on, as the season advanced, all the mills were full-handed and good money was made. Considering the many disadvantages that millers have met with the quality of the fibre turned out has been good.

Building trades: The close of the year 1912 saw the completion of most of the large buildings in course of erection, when a quietness set in all round, and has continued up to the