

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRODUCE DEPARTMENT FOR THE OFFICIAL YEAR 1912-13.

SIR,— Westminster Chambers, 13 Victoria Street, London S.W., 1st April, 1913.

I have the honour to hand you herewith a report on the work of the Produce Department during the past twelve months.

Reports.

During the year 119 reports have been made on matters affecting the New Zealand produce trade, and all these have been forwarded to Wellington as in previous years. These reports have dealt with a wide variety of subjects, including such special lines as hemp, wool, grain, grass-seed, linseed, hops, fruit, honey, eggs, kauri-gum, commercial matters relating to dairy-produce, commercial matters relating to meat, importation of meat to the Continent, Army contracts, trade with Japan, British Empire trade-marks, exhibitions, lectures, &c.

Cablegrams.

Each week a cablegram has been compiled and despatched to Wellington giving the prices of the leading lines of export from New Zealand to this country, together with a statement as to the condition of the markets on which they are handled. As can be well understood, to keep in touch with so many markets, and to make the inquiries necessary to ascertain accurately, so as to be of value to producers, the quotations for the various lines in which the Dominion is interested, and to give reliable information concerning them, requires an amount of care and tact and occupies a great deal of my time. The responsibility placed upon me when cabling quotations that are to be of use and value to producers in the Dominion is fully recognized. I am well aware that it would be useless accepting without confirmation information that might be supplied to me by persons engaged in any particular trade. I am satisfied, however, that the quotations that have been cabled weekly throughout the year will have been found to be as accurate and reliable as any that could be sent to the Dominion. As in previous years, these cables have, as far as possible, been prepared in a manner which makes it possible, by reading each cablegram with that preceding, to obtain a connected continuous report of the several markets concerned.

Agency Inquiries.

During the year many inquiries have been received from persons, both in New Zealand and in this country, desirous of undertaking agencies, either for importers or exporters. All these have received attention, and as far as possible have been placed in communication with firms with whom business might possibly result.

Exhibitions.

No large exhibitions in which the Dominion has participated have been held during the twelvemonth. Advantage has, however, been taken on several occasions of small local exhibitions at which space has been offered to the Department, either free or at very little cost. These small exhibitions have been held in country districts, and the opportunities afforded to make attractive small displays of New Zealand produce generally at them have been satisfactory. In this way a considerable amount of good has been done in interesting country people in the resources of the Dominion, and as a result inquiries have been directed to the Emigration Department.

Lectures.

During the winter months I have delivered fourteen lectures on New Zealand. Most of these have been delivered throughout the country under the auspices of the Victoria League. The remainder, having been given in London and suburbs in my spare time in the winter evenings, have not encroached to any extent on the ordinary work of the Department; while, although the work has been of considerable value, the expense incurred to the Department has not been at all great. I am pleased to report that the result of these lectures has been highly satisfactory, and I understand they have created a large amount of interest in the Dominion and its advantages amongst those to whom I had the pleasure of delivering them.

Hemp.

A large amount of attention has been given to the hemp industry. Information concerning the bonus of £12,000 offered by the Government for improvements in flax-dressing machinery or methods of dealing with the by-products was widely distributed in proper channels throughout the country. This resulted in a large amount of correspondence. The Chairman of the New Zealand Flax-millers' Association, Mr. Joseph Liggins, visited this country during the summer, and in conjunction with him a large amount of work was done in reference to the bonus matter. Many people have been interested in the subject, and it is anticipated that a number of patents will be submitted in competition for the bonus offered. As a result of the information given concerning the New Zealand hemp industry, a leading specialist in fibre machinery has decided to go to New Zealand to test his patents on the spot.

During the year the market for New Zealand hemp has shown very great improvement. Prices, compared with those ruling for some years past, have advanced 50 per cent. or more. Unfortunately, the hemp market is a peculiar and difficult one to follow, being largely dependent upon the Manila reports, and to a great extent speculative. From the reports made by me during the year and forwarded to Wellington this would be understood. It has been stated that recently the quantity of hemp offered from the Dominion has been restricted, and that prices asked by millers there have been higher than those offered on the London market. Although there has not been any keen demand evinced by manufacturers here to secure supplies, values