

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRUITGROWING INDUSTRY.

Recognizing the possibilities of the fruitgrowing industry and in view of the fact that good markets have become available for New Zealand fruit, the Government is making special arrangements for offering certain lands in the vicinity of Clyde and Alexandra for settlement for fruit-farming purposes. Sufficient areas for settling about seventy families will be offered before next planting season, and land sufficient for another seventy families should be ready for the 1916 season. If certain legislation which will be brought forward this session is approved, it is anticipated that a still further area capable of settling about a hundred and thirty families will also be ready for occupation for the 1916 season.

The construction of the water-races necessary for the proper irrigation of these lands will be pushed on as fast as possible. Close attention is being given to this very important question in other parts of the South Island.

In the northern districts of the Dominion surveys are being made, under section 20 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1912, with a view of providing allotments for occupation by gum-diggers and others who may wish to make homes for themselves on the gumfields and eventually take up fruit-farming as a means of livelihood. About thirty-three lots will be opened shortly, and later on these will be supplemented by further areas in localities where the demand is greatest. This work has been considered of such importance that a specially experienced officer has been detailed to undertake its supervision.

STATE ASSISTANCE TO TREE-PLANTING BY FARMERS.

For some time past the Government has desired to encourage farmers to plant portions of their holdings with suitable trees, and with this object section 23 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913, was passed, providing that Crown lessees should be entitled to a reduction of rent if they planted suitable trees on their holdings.

The Government hopes this year to inaugurate a scheme providing for the sale to farmers, at cost price, of forest-tree plants grown at State nurseries, on condition that the planting is done under Government supervision.

LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS.

During the year 141,327 acres, valued at £560,497, were purchased and offered for settlement. For suitable lands for dairying and grazing, values are, if anything, firmer, and it is becoming more difficult each year to secure this class of land at a reasonable price. There is still an unsatisfied demand for land of this description.

LAND SETTLEMENT FINANCE ACT.

Four associations were formed during the year, comprising an area of 4,182 acres, valued at £58,830, and a membership of twenty-seven.

NATIVE-LAND SETTLEMENT.

As much activity as possible has been displayed in the purchase of Native lands during the past year, but owing to the epidemic of smallpox the Public Health Department stopped, in several districts, all meetings of the Native Land Board and Native Land Courts, and meetings of assembled owners were not allowed to be held. This accounts for the total of the business transacted being a little less than last year. Had it not been for the epidemic the transactions would have constituted a record.

COOK ISLANDS.

His Excellency the Governor, accompanied by the Minister in Charge of the Cook Islands Administration, recently paid a visit to the Islands.

The education of Native children, for which nothing has been done by the Government of New Zealand, is being arranged for, and Parliament will be asked to make suitable provision on this year's estimates. It is proposed to establish three schools on the Island of Rarotonga, one of which will be a