

lightened by warm early rains, which have brought away a good growth of pasture. The high price of grass-seeds is a serious drawback to many farmers, who have obtained good burns during the drought, but to whom the increased cost of sowing will involve a considerable financial strain. Grazing and sheep farmers have on the whole experienced a favourable season, as, although the carrying-capacity of their holdings was diminished, this was largely counterbalanced by the enhanced prices obtained for stock, while the high prices and strong demand for all classes of farm-produce have to a large extent made up for the disadvantages arising from the abnormal season.

An examination of the reports received from the Rangers show that a generally satisfactory condition as regards fulfilment of conditions still prevails, and it must be remembered that the Rangers' reports apply to holdings in the earlier stages of settlement, when the initial difficulties of inferior access and breaking in new country afford a good deal of excuse for slight shortcomings of fulfilment. The number of defaulters is a comparatively small percentage of the whole, while in many cases the reports show an amount of compliance and substantial improvements effected that indicate the energy and persistence displayed by settlers. In this connection it may be again pointed out that a number of cases of default arise from the mistaken practice that obtains to a very large extent of applying for land without seeing it, notwithstanding the warning published on all sale plans. In the case of well-situated lands of good quality the practice may produce no bad effects, but with less favoured localities or inferior lands it frequently follows that the settler is disappointed, and either requests cancellation of his title or allows it to lapse by default in fulfilment of conditions.

Meanwhile the general development of the district, the extension of railway and roading facilities, of telephone communication, and of schools are not only improving the lot of the back-block settler, but are bringing into demand lands which were formerly neglected, but which under the application of modern methods of farming, and with facilities for conveyance of manures at reasonable cost, can be successfully brought to productivity. Of such classes are the poor gum lands of many parts of the northern district and the light pumice lands of the central area. The former are being found to be not only very suitable for fruitgrowing, but also for general farming under suitable methods, with results hitherto unsuspected. The development of the pumice lands will be largely dependent upon improved railway facilities and the carriage of manures thereon at minimum rates.

Considerable areas of bush have been felled during the season, and exceptionally good burns were obtained, the sowing of which will greatly enhance the stock-carrying capacity of the district, though the high prices of seed are a serious drawback to the grassing of new lands. In many parts of the district roadworks have been pushed on, and settlers frequently tax themselves to improve their facilities in this respect.

The Hauraki Plains lands have shown very marked progress during the year, and are being recognized as likely shortly to develop into one of the finest dairying districts of the Dominion. Many farmers from other parts, especially Taranaki, are seeking after these lands, with the usual result of a very substantial increase in goodwill.

Numerous applications for leave of absence and exemption from conditions have been made to the Land Board by Crown tenants desirous of joining the Expeditionary Forces. All such applications have received the fullest sympathy and ready acquiescence from the Board, which feels that those who volunteer to serve their country at the front are deserving of the utmost consideration.

The cases of other settlers who fail to fulfil the required conditions receive individual consideration from the Board, which endeavours, by timely leniency where necessary, to encourage due compliance, recognizing that to the *bona fide* settler a reasonable extension of time is frequently all that is needed to secure the desired results. There is, of course, another class who need different treatment, as their evasion of legitimate requirements would only retard the settlement of the district. Generally speaking, it may safely be said that the present condition and prospects of the settlement of the district are very satisfactory.

#### TRANSFERS, FORFEITURES, AND SURRENDERS.

Although there was a noticeable falling-off of transfers shortly after the commencement of the war, there has been a considerable recovery, and the total number of cases dealt with during the year, 644, is very little short of the total for the preceding period. Out of the number quoted, 620 were approved after the fullest investigation and consideration, and twenty-four were refused.

The total number of forfeitures and surrenders during the year was 129, representing an area of 36,945 acres. These figures show an increase on those for the previous year, due mainly to the practice before referred to of selecting Crown lands without prior inspection, with a frequent after-result of disappointment and consequent forfeiture.

#### IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

Satisfactory progress is still being made by the three improved-farm settlements—Rangitoto Nos 1 and 2 and Korakonui—which, with the assistance of the dairy industry, are in a thriving condition and well advanced towards independence of further assistance from the State. Fourteen of the settlers have obtained their licenses during the year, and only fourteen are still holding under the original agreements.

#### KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY.

The climatic conditions of the past season have been favourable to the working of swamp gum lands. The following were the numbers of licenses issued during the year: 336 ordinary, 1,812 special, 205 gum-buyers', and 317 residence-area licenses; the total amount of fees received being £1,345 17s.