

ANNUAL REPORT.

THE UNDER-SECRETARY FOR LANDS to the Right Hon. the MINISTER OF LANDS.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 1st May, 1916.

I have the honour to submit herewith the report on the operations of the Department of Lands and Survey for the year ended 31st March, 1916.

I have, &c.,

T. N. BRODRICK,

The Right Hon. W. F. Massey, P.C., Minister of Lands.

Under-Secretary.

REPORT.

Owing to the abnormal conditions existing at the present time it is not proposed to enter at length into the varied and numerous operations undertaken by the Department, but to touch briefly upon the salient features of the past year's transactions.

CONDITION OF SETTLEMENT.

In the North Island farmers generally have experienced a very successful season, with high prices ruling for all classes of farm-produce. The fact that wool realized record prices at the wool-sales and that there was a strong and continued demand for frozen meat naturally placed sheep-farmers, particularly the well-established ones, in a very fortunate position. The prices obtained for butter-fat, milk, and the general produce of dairy farms were much in advance of former ruling prices, and in the Taranaki District and in certain parts of the other districts farmers had exceptional returns. The dairying industry has undoubtedly developed to a considerable extent during the past few years, and each twelve months shows a marked increase. The practice of growing root and fodder crops is increasing, with good results, in the Auckland District. Weather-conditions were fairly satisfactory throughout the year, and contributed largely to a successful season. Many Crown tenants have joined the Expeditionary Forces, and in all cases the Land Board of the district has sympathetically considered and dealt with any application for postponement or remission of rent required owing to the tenant's absence, or any necessary exemption from compliance with residential or improvement conditions of the lease or license.

In the South Island Canterbury and north Otago experienced an unusually dry season. Marlborough suffered in a similar manner, but in the other districts the climatic conditions were more favourable. Although farmers in the drought localities sustained losses of stock and failure of crops, yet in south Otago, Southland, and Westland farmers have done well, and, in common with those in the North Island, obtained higher prices for produce than the average. Taken altogether, a successful season was experienced, and the reports of the Commissioners of Crown Lands in Appendix I disclose how each district has progressed.

It may not be out of place to draw attention to the assistance now given under the land laws to Crown tenants who require help. If the value of their holdings has decreased they can apply for a revaluation and reduction of price or rental; the prompt payment of rent is rewarded by a rebate; postponement of rent may be allowed for suitable periods; whilst in necessitous cases remission of rent may be granted under the Land Act, the Land for Settlements Act, and also to members of the Expeditionary Forces and discharged soldiers. It will therefore be seen that every effort is made to assist Crown tenants to successfully occupy their lands.

NOTES ON RECENT LEGISLATION.

The following is a short *résumé* of the legislation passed last session affecting the administration of the Department.

Land Laws Amendment Act, 1915.—The majority of the sections comprised in this Act might be termed machinery sections, the most important section being No. 15, which repeals former provisions in regard to the revaluation of Crown land, and provides that all revaluations shall in future be made by a committee of three, consisting of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, an officer of the Valuation Department, and one other person to be appointed by the Minister.