

FIELDS DIVISION.

REPORT OF J. BROWN, B.Sc.Ag., N.D.A., DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR.

Central Development Farm, Weraroa, 1st June, 1917.

The Secretary of Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce.

HEREWITH is submitted my report of the work and progress of the Fields Division for the year ended 31st March, 1917. As desired, the report is presented in condensed form, and deals in outline only with the various activities coming under the administrative direction of the Division.

J. BROWN, Director, Fields Division.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFF.

Amalgamation of Positions of Fields Supervisors and Fields Instructors.

Early in the year a notable change was brought about in the organization for the supervision of inspection work and for field instruction work respectively. The offices of Fields Supervisor and Fields Inspector, previously distinct and responsible for separate defined duties, were amalgamated. The six officers previously holding positions as Fields Supervisors or Fields Instructors were appointed to the new conjoint positions, and, conforming to the new arrangement, they have during the year undertaken supervisory functions in rabbit and weed control, together with executive and supervising duties in connection with field-crop experiments and general advisory work amongst farmers. The designation "Fields Instructor" has been dropped, and that of "Fields Supervisor" has been retained. Two new Supervisors have also been appointed, so that there are now such officers having headquarters at Auckland, Napier, Wanganui, Christchurch, Timaru, Dunedin, and Invercargill.

It is pleasing to be able to report that the work of these officers during the past year has fully substantiated the views which led to this important change, district work of all kinds having received a more thorough attention than was possible under the old system of separation of closely related functions, and correspondingly larger districts.

Grain-grading.

The recent appointment of Mr. A. W. Smith to the new position of Chief Grain Grader marks a forward step in that branch of the Division's work, which it has been realized for some years has been on an unsatisfactory basis. Mr. Smith had just commenced to go fully into the business of grading with a view to the recommendation of an improved system when he was called upon to undertake temporary duties in connection with wheat prices on behalf of the Board of Trade. It is hoped, however, that he will shortly be available for the prosecution of the duties for which he was appointed.

Fields Inspection.

With regard to the work of the Fields Inspectors throughout New Zealand, the events and changes which have occurred during the year are not without certain disquieting indications. Some changes have been made in the various inspectorates during the year, and also some new appointments, while several inspectorates remain vacant at the close of the year. A few of these changes have been brought about by the promotion of the officers concerned to higher positions; other vacancies have occurred through resignations, two of these being returned soldiers; the remaining changes have been brought about through enlistments for military service. Such frequent changes as have occurred during the past year not only increase difficulties at headquarters, but also react most unfavourably on the districts themselves. Especially for rabbit-infested inspectorates it is no easy matter to procure the services, as Inspectors, of men who understand and are thoroughly experienced in rabbit-control, and who possess at the same time a satisfactory general education, address, and knowledge of field-work generally to give them prestige among the communities in which they are situated. Elsewhere in this report reference is made to a system of training of future field officers for which preparations have been made, the ultimate realization of the aims of which will elevate the field-work of the Division to an altogether higher plane. In the meantime the exigencies of fields inspection necessitate fresh appointments as vacancies occur. The salary and status of an Inspector are such as to attract only men with the bare qualifications for the discharge of the routine duties, and sometimes, as in the case of rabbit districts, not even that. The Division is thus at the present time facing the very real danger of its inspectorates becoming filled by permanent officers incapable of assisting with the development and conservation of the agriculture of New Zealand, except in the very narrow sense of routine administration of the Rabbit and Weeds Acts. This tendency has been specially manifested during the past year, and how it may be checked is under consideration. It is sufficient to say that it would be most unwise to continue the making of new appointments of Fields Inspectors at salaries which were formerly sufficient to attract good men but are now no more than labourer's hire. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the duties and responsibilities imposed upon the Fields Division demand the highest type of officer in the field, and if from lack of understanding of the country's needs the narrow view of the field officers' position is adhered to it would appear to be the most ill-considered policy to continue to impose upon a professional directorate the control and regulation of a staff whose functions thus circumscribed would be purely administrative. It is, however, the earnest wish of the Division that so far from any such narrowing-down and debasement of the fields officers' position being allowed for want