

The particulars of purchases and sales of the Department for the last two years are as follow: Year ended 31st March, 1918—Purchases, £10,737; sales, £26,882. Year ended 31st March, 1919—Purchases, £18,847; sales, £14,226.

With more shipping-space and cheaper rates of freight the export trade is likely to expand considerably during the coming year.

Considerable work has been done in connection with the salt vacuum process for cleaning gum, and before long some of the treated gum will be put on the market.

LAND REQUIRING SPECIAL TREATMENT.

Steps will be taken to deal with the poor lands of the Dominion, such as the pumice and gum lands, which comprise approximately over 700,000 acres, and Parliament will be asked to provide the necessary funds. To accomplish this in a satisfactory manner it may be desirable to introduce a modification of the old homestead tenure, under which free grants of limited areas were made to selectors who would occupy and bring into profitable cultivation these waste lands of the Crown. In order to effectively deal with such areas it may also be necessary to financially assist these settlers so as to enable them to utilize the lands in a comparatively speedy and up-to-date manner.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRIES, AND COMMERCE.

During the year production has again been well maintained at a high standard, both as regards quality and quantity. The continuance of the arrangements made for the purchase by the Imperial Government of wool, meat, and dairy-produce has been most beneficial in securing stability of values in all classes of live-stock.

The large amount of exportable produce which came forward would have been increased to some extent but for a period of exceptionally dry weather which prevailed over a considerable proportion of the Dominion in the autumn, this had the effect of reducing the output of dairy-produce towards the close of the dairying season.

The stock slaughtered for freezing for export showed an increase over the previous year of 7,552 cattle, 721,883 sheep, and 236,279 lambs; and, although a considerable quantity of meat owned by the Imperial Government was left over from the previous season, the whole of the above was accommodated in the freezing-stores. At the present time, however, the stores are very full, and it will be necessary to secure adequate relief before the new season's work commences.

The butter sent into the grading-stores showed a small decrease compared with last year, but this was counterbalanced by an increase in the quantity of cheese.

The production of dairy by-products in the shape of whey butter, milk-powder, and casein is making further progress, and the enterprise shown by those engaged in dairying augurs well for the future development of this important branch of the industry.

The wool-clip shows a good return, the average price up to the end of July being higher than that of last season's entire clip; and, though some wool of lower grades still remains to be valued, the aggregate return for the season's clip will be possibly higher than that for the whole of the previous season.

The fruitgrowing industry has been handicapped by the entire lack of facilities for export and by shortage of available labour, but progress is being made in developing marketing arrangements within the Dominion and in providing additional cool-storage plant, which will prove of material assistance in furthering the interests of this branch of industry.

The necessity for furnishing practical assistance to producers in order to stimulate increased production is realized, and considerable advance has already been made in this direction.

STATE FORESTRY.

Last session it was announced that it was intended to place the State forests under the control of a separate Minister, and in November last this intention was given effect to by the appointment of the Hon. the Attorney-General as Commissioner of State Forests.