

Last winter was the most severe Otago has experienced for ten years; there were three separate falls of snow, increasing in severity, and the cold wet spring and summer prevented farming operations and the growth of root crops and rape, &c. Shearing was very late, not being concluded in some cases until February, and in December cold storms including a slight fall of snow and sleet in the back country, caused heavy mortality in the sheep just off the shears. This, added to a heavy death-rate through the winter snows, caused heavy losses to a number of the pastoralists.

In spite of the cold wet weather, however, the cereal crops have been generally good, but the wet weather has so delayed harvesting that 40 per cent. of the crops are still in stook.

In North Otago a fairly large area of wheat was sown, and the yield has been good, some of the returns being as high as 72 bushels per acre and the average yield from 40 to 50 bushels.

The oat crops have been disappointing in most places, although some exceptionally good crops have been grown, particularly on the Taieri Plain, in some cases the yields being 100 bushels and over to the acre. The turnip and rape crops have in most cases been failures, and in localities where these crops showed great promise, in the south and Balclutha districts, they were destroyed by record floods which occurred in January. An estimated area of 2,000 acres of drilled swede turnips were ruined, representing a loss of £10 to £12 per acre.

In North Otago a considerable quantity of hay has been made, but in most places there will be a decided shortage of winter feed, and in consequence there has been a temporary fall in the price of stock.

The returns from fruitgrowing have not been so good as usual owing to the partial destruction of the stone-fruits by a late frost, which also affected the pip-fruits to a considerable extent. The wet weather seems also to have been responsible for the appearance of black-spot in apples in certain localities. Prices, however, have been good, and the generally less saleable fruits, such as plums and pears, have realized high prices.

In spite of the above adverse conditions, which naturally have retarded the progress and prosperity of a large number of settlers, the good prices of wool, stock, and grain have enabled the majority to maintain a fairly prosperous position, while a good season will recoup them for

SOUTHLAND.

(THOMAS BROOK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

For many years the general report on this district has been of a most satisfactory nature, but I regret to have to record that the year ended 31st March, 1919, has proved an exception, and the prospects for the coming winter are not particularly bright.

As regards climatic conditions, the period under review has been one of the worst ever experienced. Not only was the winter a severe one, but the spring and summer were cold and wet. Snowfall caused heavy mortality amongst sheep on the high country, several runholders losing as many as eight thousand sheep each, while week after week of cold and rain resulted in heavy losses in flocks on the low country, especially amongst hoggets. The backward season is evidenced by the scarcity of grass, and for the first time on record the turnip crops generally are more or less a failure. The result is that many farmers find their holdings overstocked, and as a consequence there has been a decided drop in the prices of store cattle and sheep.

The present unsatisfactory state of the stock-market does not appear to have affected land-values, there being a very keen demand for all classes, and producers evidently expect the good prices to return with the spring. In this connection it should be noted that the demands of the soldiers have a marked tendency to increase land-values. This applies also to town properties, and probably to an even greater extent.

Dairy-farming is on the increase, but although the price of butter-fat has risen the production shows a decrease, caused by the severe season and consequent shortage of feed. The area under grain crops was less than usual, and the average yield is probably 20 bushels per acre below that of the previous season.

As mentioned in previous reports, lime is extensively used in Southland, and there is abundant evidence that its use is followed by a great increase of carrying-capacity particularly in the case of burnt lime. Unfortunately the demand greatly exceeds the supply.

The number of tenants on the books and the total area held again shows a slight decrease as compared with the figures for the previous years. This is accounted for by the fact that no land is being opened for selection by the outside public, all lands available being reserved for discharged soldiers. On the other hand, the annual rental payable continues to increase, the advance over last year being £1,631. The gross revenue for the year shows a slight falling-off compared with 1917-18, which was a record for Southland. For the first time the estimate was not reached, but this was solely due to the fact that the purchases of leases in perpetuity of settlement land were surprisingly small. The revenue derived from the total freeholds was some £4,000 less than for the former period.

Only 425 acres, consisting of one education endowment and some miscellaneous lands, were opened for selection by the general public during the year. These figures are probably the smallest yet recorded, and do not, of course, include land for soldiers. The arrears of rent as at the 31st March, 1919, show a slight increase, but nevertheless the position must be regarded as satisfactory, as they represent only a little over $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the total rental payable. The administration of education endowments in this district is a big item and entails considerable work. There are more tenants under this heading than under any other tenure. Several leases expired during the year, and in the majority of cases the lessees were granted renewals at rentals fixed by the Land Board.

Since the abolition of the School Commissioners the annual rental payable has increased by about £6,000. The interests of the endowments are carefully guarded in every way by the Land Board, in whom the control is now vested.