

in Westland. Turnip crops this year have been generally successful, though some have been destroyed, or greatly damaged, by the fly; oats and hay, although well grown, were difficult to harvest owing to unseasonable weather, and in many cases these crops were consequently wholly or partially lost. Owing to the very heavy rainfall in this district the saving of any crops of this nature is always a matter of especial uncertainty and anxiety, and now that the dairy-farmer is more and more replacing the grazier the question of providing winter feed, upon which the success of the farm often largely depends, is becoming of still greater importance. During the summer months a great deal of feed goes to waste, and probably the saving of ensilage would tend to a great extent to obviate the disadvantage of our wet seasons in this respect. So far, however, farmers have not tried this to any appreciable extent.

There is very little doubt that the future of Westland, so far as farming is concerned, will depend mainly on dairying. There are at present eight dairy factories in full operation, and some of these will have to be considerably enlarged to cope with the increased supplies. In most localities where cheese and butter factories have been established the holdings are too large to induce more intense cultivation or full utilization of the farms, and a good deal of land suitable for dairying and within easy reach of factories is now only used for grazing purposes, very few even of the dairy farms being worked to their full capacity. The subdivision of such farms, which will no doubt gradually come about, would result in the production being probably doubled. On most of the large rivers south of Waiho there is sufficient land of excellent quality to support a dairy factory on each river-flat, but at present these lands are remote and difficult of access, and are held by a very few settlers for grazing and cattle-raising. At the Haast and Okuru, in South Westland, there was a movement on foot amongst the settlers to start a cheese-factory, and to endeavour by subdivision and subletting to induce new farmers to come in. The want of satisfactory access, the remoteness and isolation of the locality, and the small number of settlers there, however, make the proposition a very difficult one to carry through successfully, but it is a movement in the right direction, and should receive every possible encouragement. Were dairy factories once established successfully in these more remote localities, there are large tracts of swamp lands throughout South Westland which, if they could be systematically drained, would considerably increase the areas of supply.

This being purely a dairying and grazing district, the effect of the recent slump in the prices of butterfat, beef, mutton, and wool was severely felt, and the unusually cold weather experienced during the latter part of February and the whole of March tended to reduce the milk-yield to such an extent that few dairy-farmers will reap much benefit from the recent improvement in the price of butter. The prices ruling for beef, mutton, and lamb at the end of the current year were—Prime ox, 25s. to 32s. 6d. per hundredweight; prime heifer, 17s. 6d. to 27s. 6d. per hundredweight; prime cow, 15s. to 25s. per hundredweight; mutton, 3½d. to 5d. per pound over all; lamb, 5d. to 6d. per pound. Wool has lately risen to about 6d. per pound. Butterfat was paid for during the season at an average of about 9d. per pound, and it is expected that in many cases there may be a substantial bonus to come after the end of the season.

The limeworks at Ross and at Kokatahi have been more than fully occupied in coping with the increasing demand for agricultural lime.

Flax-milling is at present practically dormant, and will no doubt remain so pending some marked improvement in prices and demand; only one mill has been working, and that in a small way.

The prices of timber are practically unchanged since last year, but, though there are more mills in operation, the output has decreased, being some 48,000,000 superficial feet, as against 49,000,000 last year: this is due to a falling-off in orders for rimu.

The dredging operations at Rimu Flat by an American gold-mining syndicate, referred to in former reports, were commenced some six months ago, and have since been vigorously proceeded with. I understand the results exceed expectations, and that the syndicate is considering the construction of another large dredge, and has taken up further areas for prospecting.

The area of State forest and provisional State forest has been increased during the year by some 100,000 acres, the total area now amounting to approximately 1,735,000 acres.

While, owing to the sudden fall in prices of all kinds of farm-produce and to the general financial stringency prevailing, the year just ended has been an extremely trying one, there still has been a fair amount of progress made in improving farms, &c.; the settlers generally are hopeful, and should conditions return to anything like normal, as is anticipated, there is every prospect of a speedy recovery from the effects of the recent slump.

*Land opened for Selection.*—There has been little demand for land during the past year in this district. Under the regulations for the occupation of pastoral lands some few sections were selected in the Westland and Karamea Mining District. A total area of 1,906 acres was taken up by thirteen settlers, exclusive of miscellaneous licenses. No sections were offered by ballot during the year. One education-reserve lease of 410 acres and one miscellaneous lease of 7 acres were sold at auction.

*Freeholds.*—An area of 972 acres, chiefly consisting of Crown leases, was purchased during the year, making the total area of freehold 155,602 acres.

*Land Board Work.*—Twelve meetings were held during the year, occupying one full day in each month, as scheduled. A considerable amount of time at each meeting was taken up with applications for advances, postponements, and other concessions by discharged soldiers, and in discussing and considering their position and prospects. In all eighty-five applications for land, 148 transfers, and forty-six applications by discharged soldiers were dealt with, besides a large amount of general miscellaneous work brought before the Board.

*Revenue and Arrears.*—The total gross revenue from all sources (including Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account) during the year amounted to £37,026, the rent roll being £9,744 and the arrears of rent £729. This shows an increase in the arrears from last year of £170, which is no doubt chiefly to the general depression in prices and tightness of the money-market. Every effort is being made to reduce the amount.