

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Wellington, 15th July, 1922.

DURING the period under review—the official year ended 31st March, 1922—the various branches of the Department were kept very fully employed, the work, in fact, being usually ahead of the staff.

Continued development is taking place in the agricultural and pastoral industries generally, the only retrograde movement being that shown by the further reduction in the number of sheep in the Dominion. This development has necessitated a corresponding expansion of the Department's activities, and this has been shown principally in a greater volume of instructional work, while the administration of the Stock, Slaughtering and Inspection, and Noxious Weeds Acts has been carried on with as great a degree of efficiency as circumstances permitted. The pressing need for economy has been met by a cutting-down of expenditure wherever it could be done without producing inefficiency, while maintaining the instructional services, meat and dairy inspection, grading of dairy produce, hemp, &c., control of disease, and other essential work at a proper standard, seeing that these necessary services constitute an important factor in the financial well-being of the Dominion and the health of the community. The very marked expansion of the dairy industry in particular necessitated an extension of the Dairy Division's work, and a feature of this is that those engaged in the industry have shown their willingness to bear a share of the cost involved, and are doing so.

I have to express my appreciation of the good work done by the Divisional Directors, Section heads, and staff of the Department generally during a strenuous year. Mr. A. H. Cockayne, Biologist, has given valuable assistance in practically undertaking the immediate control of agricultural instruction, field experiments, and work connected with the hemp industry, and in this has shown marked ability.

THE DEPARTMENT'S FARMS.

The question of the larger State farms operated by this Department demands special consideration at the present time, and has already been gone into by the Board of Agriculture, which has made some valuable recommendations (see report of the Board). These farms were originally established for more or less specific purposes, and it may be accepted as a fact that these original purposes have been fulfilled. For instance, at Ruakura the bringing of what had been regarded as more or less worthless swamp land into a high state of productive fertility has been most successfully demonstrated, and practically the last of the swamp area has now been taken in hand. Equal success attended the operations at Te Kauwhata, where poor refractory land has been converted into a prosperous fruit-growing settlement. Apart from the original objects aimed at, the farms have proved of considerable value from a general educational standpoint, and of late Weraroa, and especially Ruakura, have been largely utilized for the training of returned soldiers in farm and other rural occupations. This phase of educational work has now ceased entirely at Weraroa, and cannot last much longer at Ruakura, hence the necessity for determining the policy to be adopted with these and other farms. As regards the Te Kauwhata farm, the whole of it except the wattle plantations and the small area containing the homestead buildings, vineyard, and orchard has been handed over to the Lands Department for disposal.

The Ruakura farm has been a centre for a great volume of educational work in addition to what has been done for returned soldiers, of whom over a hundred were trained during the year. Short training courses for teachers and for farmers were held, and a number of parties of farmers visited the farm and gained more or less useful knowledge. Previous to the commencement of soldier training a number of youths were given courses, training varying from one to two years, and ten of these were still in residence on the 31st March, but no others were taken on after the soldier-training reached its height. A new policy is now necessary, and proposals for a training establishment on wider and more comprehensive lines have been framed and are under consideration, particularly from the financial standpoint. Another point for consideration in connection with Ruakura (899 acres) and Weraroa (767 acres) is whether it is necessary to continue such large areas as individual farms. Certainly, as recommended by the Board of Agriculture, the expenditure involved by educational work and experimental work at these and other farms should be differentiated in official statements from that necessitated by the farming operations themselves. Regarding the Weraroa farm, it may be frankly stated that no attempt has been made during the year to carry on any special educational work apart from the training of returned soldiers. For the last three years a great deal has been done in the way of renovation and improvement, and the farm is now in good order. During the year it was conducted largely on commercial farming lines, and the expenditure has been greatly reduced. The results of the year's work at Moumahaki were disappointing, and the working of the farm has been thoroughly reorganized.

Of the smaller farms, those at Arataki and Tauranga, both devoted to the fruit industry, are being disposed of. The experimental portion of the Tauranga farm will be carried on independently by the present manager, provided the negotiations with him are satisfactorily concluded.

More detailed matter regarding the operations of the farms is given under the headings of the Agricultural Instruction and Experimental Farms Branch and of the Horticulture Division.