

Rabbits on Crown and Native lands must be accepted as a responsibility resting upon the Government, and it is recommended that a special vote be taken for the purpose of dealing with them, instead of the Department bearing the entire burden of cost.

A summary of the work done in connection with rabbits during the year will be found later under the heading of the Live-stock Division.

NOXIOUS WEEDS.

The administration of the Noxious Weeds Act forms an unsatisfactory feature of the Department's work. The officers carrying it out have done their best, and there is no fault to be found as regards them; but with the progress of closer settlement the Act has become unsuitable for the altered conditions which have consequently arisen. It cannot be applied evenly and equitably throughout the Dominion, and no better illustration of this can be given than that which is afforded by Californian thistle. This weed is well established in certain parts of the Dominion: the great majority of the farmers there (who are the people most concerned) are satisfied that it is neither noxious nor a nuisance, and the practical impossibility of enforcing the provisions of the Act regarding it in these districts is so definite that enforcement has been discontinued. It has become a comparatively rare occurrence for any complaint to arise from farmers regarding this weed, and I believe that the general consensus of opinion, among at least a very large majority, is that they can quite well deal with it themselves in their own way without departmental action being necessary. The worst feature of its spread lies in its presence in oat crops and the dissemination of the seed throughout the country in oaten chaff, and, as has happened, with oats used for seed. But as regards this weed I do not consider that the damage done warrants the expenditure involved by inspection, when the extent to which this is practicable—and, in particular, the extent to which it is reasonable to enforce the Act—is thoroughly realized. The same applies to many other weeds, and it is submitted that the really dangerous weed is blackberry.

The experience gained leads to the conclusion that the legislation relating to noxious weeds needs to be recast and brought into line with present-day conditions and requirements. At present its administration involves considerable expense, yet no matter how zealously and thoroughly the inspection-work is carried out, satisfactory results cannot be expected. Blackberry and sweetbrier must be dealt with as thoroughly as is possible, and amending legislation is necessary to enable this to be done. Californian thistle and ragwort should be placed in the Third Schedule, thus enabling local authorities to exercise optional power as to whether these should be treated in their districts as noxious weeds or otherwise. Before amending legislation is drafted, I am of opinion that the whole question should be thoroughly gone into with local authorities, particularly County Councils, seeing that they are so closely associated with the working of the Act.

LIVE-STOCK DIVISION.

A wide scope of important work has been carried out by this large Division under the directorship of Mr. A. R. Young, M.R.C.V.S.

Stock Conditions generally.—The climatic conditions throughout the Dominion have been generally good for stock during practically the whole of the year under review. Some drawback occurred consequent upon a rather overbountiful rainfall during the whole of the summer, the feed, of which there was an abundance, not being quite as it should be for sheep-fattening purposes, resulting in a somewhat larger percentage of second-quality lambs than is usual going into the works for slaughter. Stock wintered well; the weather at lambing-time was good, and an excellent lambing resulted, the estimated Dominion percentage being 86.59 per cent., equivalent to 10,518,780 lambs, an increase of 904,232 over the number recorded in the previous year. All classes of stock have been maintained in a satisfactory state of health, the entire freedom of the Dominion from such serious animal-diseases as anthrax, foot-and-mouth disease, pleuro-pneumonia, tick-fever, glanders, rabies, &c., being maintained. This may be in part attributed to the stringent regulations under the Stock Act pertaining to the introduction of stock from abroad, and, having regard to the great value to the pastoral industry of this freedom from serious disease, the maintenance of these provisions is well warranted.

Animal-diseases.—Blackleg: The inoculation of calves against blackleg was continued within the boundaries of the Taranaki and Auckland districts as defined in the regulations, but the numbers coming forward for inoculation again show a considerable reduction on previous years, being 46,024 for Auckland and 39,725 in Taranaki, this being largely due to the fall in beef-values causing a much greater number of calves than usual being killed at birth. The vaccine used was, as before, all prepared at the Department's laboratory, and the results are entirely satisfactory. A number of alterations have been effected in the way of improving the facilities for preparing and attenuating the muscle used for the purpose, and ensuring an entirely satisfactory vaccine.

Contagious mammitis: This disease is still more or less prevalent throughout the Dominion, but at the same time in a very large number of cases of udder trouble, suspected of being due to this disease, examination of the milk-specimens has not confirmed the presence of the contagious form of mammitis. Of 1,094 samples of milk received at the Department's laboratory, generally from suspected cases, only 294 proved on examination to confirm the suspicion. This prevalence of inflammatory udder trouble of other origin is probably due to some extent to carelessness in the use of milking-machines. The milking-machine is a valuable and in many cases necessary adjunct to the dairy farm, but, improperly operated or carelessly used, it may become a factor in causing inflammatory trouble or in spreading contagious mammitis from cow to cow. Hence it is in the interests of dairymen to watch their machines carefully, and see that the utmost care is practised in having the parts thoroughly cleaned and regularly sterilized.