

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 26th June, 1922.

I have the honour to submit herewith the annual report on the settlement of Crown land for the year ended 31st March, 1922.

I have, &c.,

J. B. THOMPSON,

Under-Secretary.

The Hon. D. H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands.

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

Generally speaking, good seasons were experienced all over the Dominion, the one exception being Hawke's Bay, where the fourth consecutive dry year hampered farming operations considerably. The mild winter of 1921 was followed by a good spring and summer, whilst autumn rains left the ground in a very good condition. Unfortunately, the very low prices realized for wool, meat, and dairy-produce militated against a satisfactory financial result.

The prices for store cattle and other stock having fallen very considerably, it was noticed that many farmers went in for dairying in place of sheep, with the result that the dairying industry extended throughout New Zealand, and the year was a record one for the production of butter and cheese. Notwithstanding the decreased returns experienced by farmers, improvements were effected to a considerable extent, although the shortage of money prevented as much being done as was desired in this respect.

One feature that was noticed during the year was the lessened changes of ownership of farm lands; and in many cases where private lands had been disposed of during the preceding two or three years at high prices, including heavy mortgages to the vendors, the purchasers were unable to make ends meet and had to relinquish the holdings, which came back into the hands of the mortgagees or previous owners.

An upward tendency may, however, now be noticed, both as regards prices of produce and conditions generally. At the date of writing the price for butter and butterfat has hardened, whilst there is a steady increase in the prices realized for wool, and it is hoped that the corner has been turned and that the farmers of New Zealand will soon be in the same satisfactory condition that they were in in past years.

LANDS SELECTED AND AVAILABLE.

During the year 310,076 acres were selected by 1,710 persons. This must be regarded as very satisfactory in the circumstances, and it will be noticed that the average holding is less than 200 acres.

As regards lands available for selection, over 400,000 acres is open for application by the general public, and an area of about 25,000 acres is open for selection by discharged soldiers only. It must be added that discharged soldiers have preference at ballots for lands open for general application, so that they are given every facility for acquiring land should they desire to do so.

In previous years it was the custom to set aside all good land for selection by discharged soldiers only, but as the demand has now fallen off it has been found advisable to withdraw the land from Proclamation under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act and open it under the ordinary conditions of the Land Act. Up to the 31st March last 114,819 acres of land had been so dealt with.

There still remains a further area of nearly two and a half million acres, a large portion of which is now in process of survey and subdivision for settlement. Further particulars of this area are given in the annual reports of the respective Commissioners of Crown Lands, printed in Appendix I.

THE UREWERA LANDS ACT, 1921-22.

This Act gave legislative sanction to the arrangement for the consolidation of the Crown's purchases and of the non-sellers' interests in the Urewera Native Reserve.

Prior to the arrangements for consolidation being made the Crown had acquired by individual purchase interests in forty-four blocks, representing an area of 345,076 acres. These interests being undefined, and affecting forty-four blocks, were not available for settlement. To make them so available it was necessary to have them defined, which in the ordinary course would have given the Crown a separate interest in each block in which purchases had been made,