

fruit is unfortunately handicapped by the relatively small value of the product compared with its bulk, and this operates with special force as regards oversea freight rates and handling. The Government guarantee on export shipments this year—up to 11s. per case—was designed to cover all direct expenses of transport and marketing, and enabled the producers to readily finance consignments.

With ample supplies of wheat and conditional relief from the competition of Asiatic egg-pulp the poultry industry is now in an improved position, and the situation can be further ameliorated by a greater degree of co-operation among the poultrymen. It is intended by the latter to systematically test the British market next season, with a view to establishing a regular export trade in eggs. The bee-keeping industry is making steady progress, despite its share of difficulties. The exports of honey for 1922-23 considerably exceeded those for the previous year.

The Board of Agriculture, under the chairmanship of Sir James Wilson, has continued to render valuable service, many important matters having been referred to it for advice and recommendation. The mature experience of the members brought to bear on difficult agricultural questions under consideration has afforded the Department much practical guidance. This year a new Board has been appointed under amended regulations as regards nominations by the agricultural and pastoral societies. As usual, the annual report of the Board is printed as a separate parliamentary paper.

The New Zealand Meat-producers' Board has accomplished sound work during the year, such as the standardization of meat grade-marks, supervision of grading, and the limitation of small export parcels of meat. The mission of the Board's vice-chairman to London met with much success, especially in regard to the negotiation of a new freight contract for frozen meat. There can be no doubt that the concentrated weight and authority of the Board behind its representative materially influenced the substantial reduction in freight rates conceded by the shipping companies. Appreciation is also due to the New Zealand Wool Committee, which has again done valuable work in connection with regulation of the local wool-sales and other matters concerning the well-being of the wool industry.

Broadly surveying the position, the capacity of the Dominion for a steadily increasing output of primary products has been well demonstrated by the year's experience, and although world conditions are still far from stable, and more or less fluctuation in the value of food products may occur in consequence, there are many factors operating in favour of the overseas trade in our great staples of production. Altogether, the immediate prospects are good, while as regards the near future our agricultural and pastoral industries can be regarded as certain to extend greatly, not only as a result of extension of land-settlement, but also, and to a marked degree, through increased production from areas already settled, and capable, with better farming practice, of producing much more than they do at the present time. New Zealand itself is a magnificent asset for agriculture, and possesses an energetic and capable farming community. Effective mobilization of our resources, organization on extended co-operative principles, and a general pulling together, are capable of immense results for the rural interest and the Dominion generally.

A condensed but comprehensive record of the varied activities of the Department is given by the Director-General in his accompanying report, which shows that a very large amount of useful work has been carried out. It is satisfactory to note that the instructional as distinguished from the inspectional or penal side of the Department is being brought steadily to the front as circumstances allow. The requisite scientific basis on which practical instructional work must rest is also being surely strengthened in the Department's organization. Better farming—raising the average standard of practice in all branches—holds good as the objective. The continued close economy which has been necessary during the year has caused the postponement of some important projects, but having regard to the present financial improvement it is hoped that an effective advance may now be made.

Concluding this brief review of some of the more salient features of the agricultural year, I would record my appreciation of the capable and zealous personnel of the Department in its various branches.

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