

The orchardist of to-day is well past the experimental stage; the general appearance of the orchards, knowledge of spraying and pruning, the grading and packing of fruit, all show a high degree of efficiency, and the possibilities of this District for orchardists are inexhaustible, in that the larger area of pumiceous country, which is regarded as the poorer portion, may in course of time be found to be amongst the finest of fruitgrowing areas.

The excellent results obtained by top-dressing and light cultivation on the large area of pumiceous country referred to, which in the past has been regarded as suitable for light grazing only, has been fully demonstrated by several progressive settlers in the heart of this class of country. The formation, for the most part, comprises from 4 in. to 6 in. of light loamy soil on a pumiceous subsoil, varying from 2 in. to 4 in., resting on a clay bottom. Good crops of clover and cow-grass have been harvested and the areas then sown down in permanent English grasses. With the advent of the railway and reduced cost of manures it seems safe to predict that an ever-increasing area will gradually be brought into a high state of cultivation and the carrying-capacity of this land largely increased.

With the firmness of the closing prices of the wool-sales, the present satisfactory condition of the stock, and abundance of fodder, the prospects for the coming season appear particularly bright.

Land Board.—Twelve meetings of the Board were held during the year. The volume of work transacted has been considerable, and in connection therewith I desire to express an appreciation of the valuable assistance and advice tendered to transferees and applicants for land by the members of the Board, who are all thoroughly practical capable farmers. During the year visits of inspection to the Tangoio and Omana Settlements were made by the Board.

The most important and at the same time most difficult and intricate work of the Board is concerned with dealings under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and the determinations and current-account adjustments of the Dominion Revaluation Board, but these matters have now practically reached finality and the position of the soldier settler so defined that the difficulties in future dealings will be almost eliminated.

Revenue in Arrears.—The gross revenue for the year was £246,252, a decrease on the past year of £22,153. It is regretted that the hope expressed in the last annual report has not been fulfilled. The falling-off is due in great part to climatic conditions causing a loss of stock and depreciating values of primary products. The total arrears at the end of the year was £13,594.

During the coming season several areas of Crown land will be open for selection. Keen competition is expected for the Waimarama Block, which has a great reputation in this district. Hereheretau, a nice compact block of good sheep-country, will be opened for selection in May. The balance of the Purahotangihia Block, about 6,000 acres, will also be offered. The leases of several valuable education reserves expire during the year, and if offered at auction will be the means of largely increasing the revenue of the education endowment.

Noxious Weeds.—The position remains very much as hitherto. Where settlers have obtained remission of rent equivalent to value of labour expended in dealing with the blackberry much has been done to keep this curse in check. The goat is also doing good work in checking the growth; but, so far, the discovery of a satisfactory eradicator appears as far off as ever.

TARANAKI.

(W. D. ARMIT, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past season has been a fairly successful one from the point of view of Crown-lands settlement. Vacant areas in the Kohura Settlement and Tawhiwhi Settlement have been disposed of after lengthy periods of non-selection. A number of vacant sections in the much-discussed Parihaka Block have also been selected. No new blocks have been placed on the market, the Crown land vacant areas being confined to Wanganui River country for the most part, where experience has proved the great difficulty of holding the steep papa and sandstone spurs in grasses for any period of years. The Taumatamahoe and Whitianga Blocks are cases in point where it would be folly to expend large sums of money in roading and bridging to give the necessary access for development, taking into account the present market prices of beef and wool.

From a productive farming point of view the past season has been above the average. Dairymen have suffered very heavily through the low pay-outs of the various factories. The average reduction in pay-outs has been at least $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent., and the reduced spending-power of the dairying community has been apparent during the season. Where economies have been effected in reduced orders for top-dressing the resultant loss will be again apparent next season in the direction of lower production of butterfat due to thinning-out of pastures, and, unfortunately, many dairymen have followed this course.

Graziers have had an improved season. Lambing percentages were good, and sales of fat stock well maintained. Complaints from the back country regarding the menace of wild pigs are still frequent, and unceasing efforts are required to keep this pest in check.

Investigations in terms of the Deteriorated Lands Act, 1925, have been proceeding, and a fair amount of success has been achieved in securing concessions for lessees from mortgagees apart from the concessions by way of remission of rentals or loans granted by the Lands Department. Settlers generally have voiced their keen appreciation of the assistance rendered, although there are the