

NELSON.

(A. F. WATERS, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Selections of Crown lands have shown a falling-off as compared with the previous twelve months. A total area of 24,887 acres, comprising ninety-four holdings, was selected, several of these selections being small village allotments. An area of 87,479 acres is open for selection in the Crown Lands Guide. During the year four tenants acquired the freehold of their properties, containing an area of 1,474 acres.

Dairying Industry.—The low prices obtaining for butter during the past season have made it very difficult for dairy-farmers to carry on. Unprecedented floods in the Buller Valley in late spring caused extensive damage to pasture on the river flats, and the factories operating in this area will show diminished returns for the season. The class of dairy cow in the district shows steady improvement as a result of testing and culling.

Sheep-farming.—Generally speaking, the past season was much better than the previous season. The lambing percentage improved, while prices obtained for clips showed an increase.

Statutory Inspection of Leaseholds.—During the year statutory inspections of leaseholds were brought up to date, and in most cases Crown tenants are complying with the conditions of their leases.

Hop and Fruit Growing.—The season has been unusually dry. This has suited the growth of hops in some localities and retarded them in others, but the crop should be well up to the average. The marketing is still controlled by the Nelson Hopgrowers' Association. Small fruits showed a lighter setting than usual, consequent upon the dry season. The apple crop is lighter than last year, but London prices to hand indicate that the orchardists will have a successful season.

Deteriorated Lands Act.—Approximately half of the Nelson Land District was proclaimed as being subject to the above Act. The Special Revaluation Committee appointed to consider applications has been actively engaged in inspections since the beginning of the year, but on account of the number and scattered nature of the holdings concerned it would appear that a further six months will be required for them to finish their work. The revaluations already to hand show considerable reductions in the capital values of many of the poorer sections. Advances have not been made for the purchase of lime and manure, as it was not considered advisable to increase the capital charges, but concessions in the way of remission of rent have been given to enable the settlers to make the necessary improvements out of farm revenue.

Agriculture.—Grain crops have been unusually heavy on the Waimea Plain. An increasing number of farmers appear to be going in for tobacco-culture, and with the inauguration of an export trade in this valuable commodity, a profitable side-line is available for settlers whose holdings permit of mixed farming.

Revenue.—The revenue received during the year totalled £60,362. Of this amount £17,644 was from ordinary Crown tenants, the balance being receipts on account of discharged-soldier settlers. These figures show a decrease over last year's figures of £4,666.

The amount of arrears by ordinary Crown tenants at the 31st March was £9,577.

Land Board.—During the year twelve ordinary meetings of the Board were held. Mr. W. C. Mirfin was reappointed a member by His Excellency the Governor-General. I desire to record my thanks to the members of the Board for cordial co-operation in all matters placed before them for decision.

MARLBOROUGH.

(JOHN STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Generally speaking, the farming community of Marlborough are holding their own. Some are feeling the financial strain to a certain degree and require a little nursing, but with practical help and advice will, I have no doubt, pull through all right.

Climatic conditions have generally been favourable, with the exception, perhaps, of the fall of snow on the ranges in September and the floods in the Lower Wairau in November. These, combined with heavy rains at the end of December, are the only outstanding features which affected the farming community; nevertheless, they nearly all appear quite optimistic of the future.

The excellent price obtained for rabbit-skins is having the effect of considerably reducing the rabbits in Marlborough. Properties which only a year or two ago were almost overrun are now practically clear.

The dairy-farmers have not done as well as expected, owing mainly to the poor price obtained for produce, and a certain amount of abortion, &c., amongst the herds.

Wool and Sheep.—On the whole, the conditions have been favourable for the sheep-farmer throughout Marlborough. The wool-clip was generally good and the prices satisfactory. Marlborough is noted for its merino wool, and competition for this class was very satisfactory. Each year the flocks are being improved by the importation of specially selected rams.

The price of sheep, however, has fallen towards the end of the season much lower than the price of wool warrants. No doubt the financial position of the farmers and the dry season since the December rains had a bad effect on the market. It is not paying the farmer to send his store sheep away this season, as they are fetching a bigger price here than elsewhere.