

1927.

NEW ZEALAND.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1926-27.

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

SIR,—

Department of Agriculture, Wellington, 15th July, 1927.

I have the honour to forward herewith, for your Excellency's information, the report of the Department of Agriculture of the Dominion for the financial year ended 31st March last.

It is satisfactory to record that the past agricultural year has been marked by an increased volume of production in most of the country's primary staples. On the other hand, the world market prices for several of these leading products have declined in varying degree, thus counterbalancing the financial increment which would otherwise have accrued to the producers. Statistics for the twelve months ended 30th June this year show the aggregate value of exported agricultural produce to be on a par with the total recorded for the preceding yearly period. In order to correctly assess the position, however, comparison must be made with the year 1924-25, from which level (allowing for certain movements in the domestic market for produce) value has fallen by some ten millions sterling.

Weather conditions during the year, though not uniformly good at all periods, have been favourable on the whole, as evidenced by the great output from the land.

The group of products derived from the sheep—wool, mutton and lamb, skins, and other by-products—took first place in aggregate value. A further substantial increase in the flocks was registered, the total number of sheep now being again over the twenty-five million mark, with a very strong proportion of breeding-ewes. Combined with a good average lambing this resulted in a very big crop of lambs. An excellent clip was secured generally, as regards both weight and quality. The local wool-sales were characterized by steadiness throughout the season, at a range of values appreciably higher than those of the preceding year. Prices for fat sheep and lambs ruled lower than in the 1925-26 season, but there were increased slaughterings in both classes at the meat-export works—lamb killings constituting a new high-level record. Average dressed weights of mutton and lamb were somewhat higher than in the preceding season.

Cattle other than dairy cows registered a further decrease in the annual enumeration, and beef exports (apart from the boned article) showed another marked drop in quantity. Needless to say, the shrinkage in cattle is a serious matter in relation to pasture-management, especially on the rougher country, and all reasonable steps should be taken to encourage the raising of this class of stock, even though, unfortunately, the values for frozen ox-beef on the British market so far continue at a depressed level. The existence of a very fair and growing domestic market for beef must not be lost sight of, however. It is reassuring to note of late indications that the position may largely right itself in the near future. A strong demand for young cattle is reported from several important grazing districts, where feed conditions require their use.

The dairy industry season of 1926-27 has been notable in several directions. Although operating with a slightly reduced number of cows, the industry has put