

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

THE past year has, on the whole, been a very satisfactory one for the farming community generally, and Crown tenants have taken full advantage of the favourable conditions to consolidate their position and improve their holdings as much as possible. A good winter was experienced in most districts, followed by a very fair spring and early summer, and, although the exceptionally dry conditions that prevailed later gave a more or less serious set-back to production, the closing months of the year brought splendid rains and improved the pastures to a remarkable degree. The long dry spell resulted in a temporary shortage of feed in many districts; but, on the other hand, rendered possible a cleaning-up by fire of areas that have for years been under fern and second growth, thus enabling many farmers to re-establish pasture on difficult portions of their holdings. Some damage was necessarily caused by fires getting out of hand and destroying considerable areas of pasture; but steps were taken to provide fire-relief loans for grass-seed in suitable cases.

The dairying season commenced under most favourable conditions, and at one stage it was confidently anticipated it would prove an exceptional one from the production point of view. Many settlers had been busy throughout the winter in improving their sections and top-dressing pastures, and the generous rainfall experienced in most districts during the winter and early spring gave the season an excellent start. It was unfortunate that the long spell of dry weather later seriously reduced production; but the closing months of the year retrieved the position, and, taken all round, the season proved a most productive one. Farming practice has continued to improve, and it is now generally accepted that a liberal use of fertilizers in the form of top-dressing is absolutely necessary to maintain and improve pastures and increase production.

The sheep-farmer has had a very good year, and the season has been marked by a succession of extremely successful wool-sales, the demand for all classes of wool proving to be exceptionally keen. Prices obtained were eminently satisfactory, and, following the sales, the distribution of the large sums of money involved must have a beneficial effect upon the financial condition of the pastoral industry and the Dominion generally. A satisfactory feature has been the readiness of wool-growers to accept the good prices offering, with the result that an almost total clearance of wool has been effected, leaving practically no carry-over into the next season. The fat-lamb trade has also proved remunerative, and the good season experienced for both wool and lamb has been reflected in an increased demand for pastoral properties.

Good grain crops have been fairly general in the agricultural districts, and the returns from wheat should be quite satisfactory. The increased use of mechanical power on agricultural farms has no doubt been of assistance to the grain-grower, in allowing of deeper ploughing and increased and speedier tillage operations. Oats are, of course, now somewhat in the nature of a minor crop; but good yields have been obtained this season, and the returns should be fairly profitable.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands during the year totalled approximately 460,000 acres. The tenants on the books of the Department under all tenures now number 36,627, occupying a total area of over 19,600,000 acres. Over 9,500,000 acres of this total is represented by pastoral runs, the majority of which are situated in the Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago, and Southland Districts; while 1,800,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the Land for Settlements Act.

A considerable number of tenants who hold lands under occupation-with-right-of-purchase licenses, and who have been for various reasons unable to complete the purchase of their land during the term of the original license, have obtained extensions of the term under the provisions of section 2 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1925, as amended by section 16 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1927.

Land revenue has been well maintained, the total receipts showing a slight increase on last year's figures.

Further progress has been made with the development of the Hutt Valley Settlement scheme, a special report on which will be found in Appendix IV. A commencement was made during the year with the sale of residential sections in the Orakei Garden Suburb, Auckland, and excellent prices were realized. There was a spirited demand for some of the choice sections overlooking the harbour.

Energetic and successful efforts have been made to deal with farms that for various reasons have come back into the hands of the Department for disposal. Steps have been taken to have these places reselected as soon as possible, and with this end in view substantial reductions in capital values and rentals have been made in cases where such action was warranted on account of deterioration or other sufficient reasons. Use has also been made, when offering or reoffering certain types of land, of the power that now exists to grant remission of rent on condition that an amount equivalent to such remission is expended on improvements.

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the legislation passed in 1927 affecting the operations of the Lands Department:—

Land Laws Amendment Act, 1927.—This Act contains several interesting provisions. One effect of the new provisions is that in special cases a Proclamation may be issued declaring that any town or suburban land offered at auction may be disposed of subject to any or all of the following conditions:—

- (a) Auction sales may be advertised and held without the necessity of publicly announcing the upset prices fixed.
- (b) Sales may be held at shorter notice than thirty days.
- (c) Purchasers on deferred payments to be restricted to two contiguous lots.
- (d) Transfers of deferred-payment licenses to be barred for ten years unless on the recommendation of the Land Board and approved by the Minister.