

NELSON.

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

The weather for the past year has been unusually dry in the Nelson District. The winter was fine, without much snow in the back country, and stock generally wintered well. The spring rains were less than usual, and were generally followed by dry southerly winds. The weather set in hot and dry before the end of the year and developed into the driest spell for forty-five years. Much damage was done in parts of the district by bush and grass fires, and settlers were put to considerable expense to regrass the burnt areas of their farms. There has been little growth of grass through the summer, and stock in many cases have fared badly.

Sheep and Wool.—Wool-prices have been exceptionally good during the past year, and the prices steadily improved right up to the closing sales. Prices of sheep have not improved proportionately, due, no doubt, to the poor prices for export mutton and the shortage of feed through the drought and fires. A considerable number of sheep have been driven to Inangahua Junction and railed to Addington, thereby relieving local conditions.

Dairying.—Prices for dairy-produce have been good, but the dry weather has curtailed the output considerably. Many dairy-farmers were compelled to dry off the greater part of their herd early in the new year through lack of feed. Farmers with areas of swamp land have benefited by the dry weather but those with light country have had a poor season.

Grass-seed Relief.—Steps were taken to assist settlers who had suffered heavy loss by grass-fires and whose financial resources would not enable them to purchase the necessary seed. Reports were obtained on the various applications with the utmost expedition, and every effort was made to enable the settlers to obtain seed before the autumn rains set in. Advances for the purchase of seed were made by the Superintendent, State Advances, out of the General Purposes Relief Fund.

Deteriorated Lands.—The Committee appointed to investigate applications for relief under the Deteriorated Lands Act have practically finished their work. The concessions made to the various settlers should enable them to work their holdings successfully and overcome the deterioration to a large extent.

Orchards.—The apple crop appears to be heavy and of good quality. As usual, the greater part is exported. Prices obtained for early shipments are very satisfactory, and there is every prospect of a good season.

Hops.—These have suffered to some extent from the dry weather, but generally the crops have been fairly satisfactory.

Tobacco.—Many areas planted in tobacco have failed to mature through lack of moisture. It is unfortunate that so many farmers have met with an unfavourable season for their initial attempt at tobacco-growing. In the Riwaka district, where the soil is richer, some very satisfactory crops have been obtained.

Revenue.—The revenue received during the year totalled £56,470. Of this amount £13,003 was received from ordinary Crown tenants, the balance being receipts on account of discharged-soldier settlers. These figures show a decrease on last year's figures of £3,913, which is attributable mainly to the operation of the Deteriorated Lands Act.

Land Board.—During the year twelve ordinary meetings and one special meeting of the Board were held.

On the 13th July, 1927, the Board lost one of its oldest and most highly esteemed members by the death of Mr. Robert Win. Mr. A. R. Edwards was appointed to the vacancy, and Mr. George McMahon was reappointed for a further term.

On the 20th December, 1927, an election was held to fill the place of Mr. Robert Patterson, tenants' representative, who had decided not to seek re-election, and resulted in the election by a substantial majority of Mr. John O'Regan.

I wish to thank all members of the Board for their cordial co-operation and assistance in all matters brought before them.

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The farmers generally in the Marlborough Land District have experienced a good year, and the results of the season's operations, with perhaps the exception of the dairymen in the northern portion of the district, should be well up to, if not beyond, an average one, both in quantity and quality of produce; also, good prices have been realized, and a more hopeful tone is apparent. With another year or two of good prices for produce, combined with careful management, the farmer's position should be more or less stabilized.

Generally, climatic conditions consisted of a mild winter, with good rains in the spring and early summer, followed by a very dry spell during January, February, and March. Rain came again in April, and the prospects for a good autumn and winter are particularly bright. Kaikoura district, unlike the rest, has experienced a wet season.

Sheep and Wool.—The sheep-farmers in Marlborough have experienced a fine season, and although, on account of climatic conditions, the wool-clip was somewhat lighter than usual the excellent prices received more than compensated for the deficiency in weight.

Prices for store and fat sheep were well up to the average, except for a slight easing of values during the dry period in early March, and with the prospects for a good autumn the tendency is for prices to rise.