

The annual ram and ewe fair was held in February at the Agricultural and Pastoral Showgrounds, with good entries in both classes, when fair prices were obtained all round.

Dairying.—Though the dry spell affected the dairy-farmer in the northern portion of the district, lowering the production to a certain extent, still, taking it all through, they have had a good year. Prices for butterfat have been good (1s. 5d. to 1s. 7d.), and the prospects for this class of farming are good.

There is still a good deal of abortion and sterility amongst the dairy herds in the district, the Stock Department apparently not having yet discovered a solution of the trouble or a means of prevention. This disease is a very serious matter, and it would be a boon to the dairyman if some cure or preventive could be found.

Agriculture.—Agricultural farmers have experienced a good year.

It having been a good season, barley, wheat, and oats have been harvested in good condition and yielded well.

Peas : This has been the best season for years, crops yielding heavily (up to 70 bushels per acre) and prices ranging from 6s. to 10s. per bushel.

Clover : One of the most popular crops grown in the district. Owing to the very dry summer, the returns from the light lands were poor ; but the season suited the heavy land, consequently the yield was very good. The return (approximately 3,000 sacks) is somewhat less than usual ; price 8d. to 9d. per pound.

Lucerne : This crop, from a feeding and hay point of view, has proved invaluable during the dry spell, and good hay is in heavy demand at £3 per ton. Very little was grown for seed, owing to the market being depressed for some considerable time.

Orchards.—This industry appears to be becoming more stabilized and coming into its own, if one can judge by the amount of fruit exported and the great improvements made in the way of shipping control, &c. It is early yet to say how prices will range this season on the London market. Sales opened well, then had a tendency to ease ; still, there is a prospect of a fair return being realized. The export figures (30,000 cases) constitute a record for the district.

Poultry.—The local egg circle from 174 suppliers placed just on one million eggs on the market during the year, at an average price of 1s. 10d. per dozen—slightly less than last year, but yet quite a satisfactory figure.

Timber Industry.—A number of mills still operate in the district, but the source of supply is limited. Most of the output is utilized in the Marlborough and Nelson Districts.

Flax-mills.—Four flax-mills continue to operate in the district, and the output for the year runs between 350 and 400 tons of hemp at an average price of £30 per ton. The Marlborough hemp retains its high average grade.

Rabbits.—On account of the continued good prices for skins, rabbits are being kept well in hand. The East Coast Rabbit Board is performing exceptionally good work within its boundaries, and the improvement in the carrying-capacity of the country is sufficient evidence of the value of the work.

Noxious Weeds.—Blackberry, the worst of the noxious weeds, is being systematically worked out by means of goats, particularly in the bush districts. Tauhinau, although not classed as a noxious weed, has a big hold in the Sounds County and is a great pest.

Land Board.—Twelve ordinary meetings of the Board were held, when a total of 271 cases were dealt with, 83 being connected with discharged soldiers, 60 ordinary transfers, and 128 miscellaneous cases.

I have been absent from Marlborough for practically the whole of the year on deteriorated-lands business in Nelson, and wish to thank my deputy, Mr. P. R. Wilkinson, Chief Draughtsman, and Mr. Torrance, Chief Clerk, for the way in which they have handled and conducted the business during my absence ; also a very keen and efficient staff for the attention they have given to their duties during the year.

WESTLAND.

(W. T. MORPETH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—Record favourable weather conditions were experienced all over the district during the year. The spring and summer weather, in the opinion of many of the old settlers, has never been paralleled. The consequence of the long periods of dry fine weather was that there has been an abundance of feed everywhere and a notable advance in butterfat-production. The white and green crops have been very successful and much hay has been saved.

While it goes without saying that a favourable season is, of course, all to the good, it appears to be well established that even under adverse conditions production may be doubled, if not more than doubled, by renewing pastures from time to time by the judicious use of fertilizers and top-dressing, and by herd-testing. Competent dairy-farmers have proved this beyond doubt, and all who are engaged in the industry who have not already done so are strongly urged, both in their own interests and in the interests of the community as a whole, to give these two aspects or conditions of their occupation their careful and practical attention.

Lime-works.—The lime-works at Kowhitirangi and Ross are still in active operation. It is very much to be regretted that these concerns do not receive a more liberal measure of local support.

Timber.—The total output of sawn timber for the year was 57,449,800 superficial feet, a decrease of 9,403,500 on the previous year. Of this total, 21,891,000 superficial feet were cut from Warden's licenses, 2,597,100 superficial feet from Crown land, 18,699,200 superficial feet from freehold, and 14,262,500 superficial feet from State forests. The quantity of timber exported was 15,844,100 superficial feet, a decrease of 3,180,100 superficial feet on last year's export. One half of the total output for the year passed through the Otira Tunnel.