

During the past twelve months twenty-two soldier properties have been abandoned or made subject to foreclosure, and twelve farm properties have been disposed of. There is decidedly better inquiry of late months for grazing-country, which comprises the bulk of the vacant farms. Dairy propositions are readily disposed of at all times.

On farm properties there are 420 soldiers who have received assistance under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1917, and 490 have been financed into house properties.

Including Current Account advances, a total sum of £1,202,459 17s. is outstanding. During the past year the revenue amounted to £184,784 5s. 8d., and advances totalling £85,137 12s. 3d. were made. The arrears under each heading have been slightly reduced during the year, and at present stand as follows: Farm properties, £11,745 0s. 4d.; house properties, £2,118 17s. 6d.; and Current Account interest, £2,670 10s.

During the last twelve months considerable concessions have been made to the soldier farmers, in reducing their mortgages and in remitting and postponing their outstanding interest payments.

Practically every Board meeting sees applications being lodged for transfers or dealings with house properties, due partly to unemployment and partly to transfer of mortgagors to other districts. Through various reasons it was found necessary to exercise power of sale in fourteen cases during the year, and fifteen resales were effected. Unfortunately, there is very little demand for house properties at present, and there are still about fifteen houses on hand.

WELLINGTON.

(H. W. C. MACKINTOSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Soldier settlers are scattered right throughout the whole district, and the remarks made as to conditions of settlement on ordinary Crown lands apply generally to them. There is this difference, however: that in a number of cases the soldier settler has little and sometimes no reserve capital with which to meet any adverse circumstance, such as drought, disease in the herd, or the expenditure necessary to maintain pastures, or to increase their production.

Taking into consideration the present price of produce, where the settlers are engaged in dairying it is recognized that the main reason for the shortage of reserve capital is, in at least some of the soldier settlements, that the areas are on the small side for really successful farming. It is the policy of the Wellington Land Board, when a holding becomes vacant in one of these settlements, to split it up in the most economical manner among the adjoining men. This has been done in several cases, and the settlers who have obtained increased areas are feeling the benefit. In a number of cases the margin between a successful dairy farm and one that affords a bare existence is often only an area sufficient to carry an additional, say, ten cows; but to bring about the desired increase of area to give the additional carrying-capacity is a slow process, as so few areas suitable for the purpose are coming back on our hands. However, as further areas fall in in this class of settlement the policy will be continued.

Soldier settlers on dairying-lands have had a good year on the whole. Some of them have top-dressed their pastures, with good effect. There seems a growing desire among dairymen to get the best possible class of dairy cows, and they are culling the "boarders" from their herds and replacing them with the best they can afford.

Graziers have improved their positions during the year, and should be able in some measure to clear off the deficits of past lean years. There appears at present to be a prospect of present prices stabilizing, and a further improvement in the affairs of these settlers may be looked for next year.

A few properties have been abandoned, but these are easily disposed of where the area is of such size that a living can be made on it. The smaller properties, however, are inclined to hang fire.

The amount received during the year by way of payments of interest and principal, &c., was £319,303 5s. 5d. The amount outstanding on loans and advances as at 31st March, 1928, was—On farms, £929,751 4s. 5d.; on dwellings, £1,341,612 10s. 5d.; and on Current Account advances, £407,054 18s. 7d.

NELSON.

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

The majority of soldier settlers in the Nelson District are now on a sound financial basis, with every prospect of making a success of their holdings. There are still a number who, on account of the limited productive capacity of their properties, are unable to meet accruing charges in full. In these cases a further investigation is being made to ascertain whether a temporary concession in annual charges will enable them to effect sufficient improvements to meet future commitments in full.

A considerable number of soldier settlers whose holdings come within the areas proclaimed as being subject to the Deteriorated Land Act, 1925, have received considerable concessions as a result of the investigations of the Special Revaluation Committee. It is anticipated that the relief granted will have the effect of putting the settlers on a sound footing.

The protracted dry spell during the past summer has hit many of the soldier settlers very hard. This applies particularly to dairy-farmers, some of whom were compelled to dry off the greater part of their herds in January through lack of feed. Some of the sheep-farmers also were short of feed through grass and log fires. The tobacco crop in many cases failed to come up to expectation, owing to the continued drought. Wool-prices have been unusually high, and sheep-farmers generally have had a successful season. Fruitgrowers have had quite a successful season. The apple crop has been very satisfactory, with every prospect of remunerative prices.