

## GISBORNE.

(E. H. FARNIE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The total rainfall for the year was slightly above the average in the Bay of Plenty, April, June, and August to November all being fairly wet months, while May, July, and December to March were all dry, and well below the average. The East Coast, on the other hand, experienced a fall far short of the usual, although during July and August, and to a lesser degree in June and September, there were heavy snowfalls. Snow fell during July and again in September. Cold and stormy weather during the latter month, and also in October and November, checked the growth that had set in during the early spring. Dry westerly winds soon had the country drying up, and the drought conditions lasted till the end of the financial year. The shortage of feed forced farmers to reduce their flocks and herds. Consequently, stock of all kinds had to be practically sacrificed for what it would fetch.

That part of the district lying along the main central ridges from the East Cape to Matawai and Motu was more fortunate, and settlers there experienced much heavy rain which ensured ample feed for their flocks.

During a somewhat similar drought period in 1925-26 many settlers suffered heavily from losses of cattle and they had just about recovered from that blow, and stocked up again, only to have to face a more trying period during the year that has just drawn to a close. It is rather premature at this stage to give any indication of what the losses of stock will amount to, and, even if the weather breaks now, as it appears to have done, it may be too late to ensure a reasonable amount of growth before the colder weather sets in. Under the circumstances, the present outlook is not at all promising.

Owing to poor prices ruling last season, due to heavy importations from South Africa, a very much reduced area of maize was sown this year, and with very poor results owing to the weather conditions. But for the drought conditions, dairying would have shown an all-round increase in production throughout the district in continuation of the gradual increase made in the last few years. Nevertheless, a considerable increase in dairying can still be anticipated in this district. Herd-testing has made remarkable progress, last season nearly five times as many cows being tested as in 1926-27.

## HAWKE'S BAY.

(J. D. THOMSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past year has been a bad one for the greater part of the district. Weather conditions during the first quarter were very dry, the winter was cold with snow in parts, but the rain was not heavy. Cold southerly winds were the rule. Spring was cold, and there was an absence of warm weather until Christmas time. Very little rain was experienced, and drought conditions set in early and continued until practically the end of March. The effect on the pastures was ruinous, and whole districts were absolutely bare of grass, the sheep having to be shifted to outside areas in order to prevent excessive mortality. The dairy-farmer was rather better off than the sheep-farmer, but the prices obtained for butterfat, averaging from 9d. to 1s., do not give much scope for profitable farming, and, in addition, the output was much lower than usual. During winter and early spring there was a rather heavy mortality amongst sheep and hoggets as the result of lack of good pasture and the presence of liver-fluke trouble. At the commencement of the killing season a few farmers were able to get up to £1 for fat lambs, but prices then rapidly receded, and the average would be about 10s. to 12s. 6d. Fat lambs were the only bright feature of the sheep-farming industry, and even this was not too bright. Prices of sheep fell to pitiful levels, quite good store sheep being purchased at 1s. and even less. The price obtained for wool showed a further drop on last season, the average being about 6d. per pound. There was a slight rally in February, but prices then came down again. Owing to poor feed the clip was lighter than usual, and, as a result of these conditions, few farmers have made sufficient to pay annual charges and farming expenses, and it is anticipated that there will be numerous applications for concessions. The southern part of the district—that is, from Dannevirke—did not suffer to the same extent from the severe drought conditions which affected the rest of Hawke's Bay, and dairy-farmers there would have had more of a normal season had prices been better. Generally speaking, the drought, though bad enough, was not so severe as the record drought of 1925-26.

A most disastrous earthquake shook the district on the morning of the 3rd February, and left widespread havoc in its wake. The area badly affected was from Wairoa to Waipawa, and the towns suffered severely. In Napier the 'quake was followed by a devastating fire which swept over the business area and completed the destruction started by the earth-lift. There was an appalling loss of life in Napier and Hastings. The office of the Department at Napier was badly shattered, the roof and upper walls collapsed, and the fire which followed destroyed all documents, books, and valuable records, completely disorganizing the office. Unfortunately, one member of the staff, Mr. T. M. Ryan, lost his life in this disaster.

Considerable damage was done to settlers' houses, fences, and land. In some localities all the fences were down owing to the spurs either slipping or being shattered so badly that the posts broke or were pulled out of the ground. The damage to houses was very severe in a number of cases, and practically every chimney from Wairoa to Waipukurau was thrown down. Some houses were practically wrecked. Drains and river-courses had their channels narrowed owing to the banks moving inwards and leaving in some instances wide cracks running parallel to the channel. This may be a very serious trouble when heavy rains come. Rains and floods will also affect the shattered areas on spurs and sidelings which will probably slip badly. The upheaval of the land was most pronounced in some localities, and roads to settlers' farms suffered serious damage, access in numerous cases being cut off. The main road north was impassable in several places owing to tons of rock and clay slipping in the gorges. The destruction by fire of several thousand bales of wool at Port Ahuriri will be a serious blow to the owners, many of whom were Crown lessees. In some cases two years' clips were lost.