

Weather conditions throughout the year have been against successful farming operations, the eastern part of the district experiencing a prolonged dry spell through the autumn and winter, with an absence of the usual spring rains. Heavy mortality has occurred among sheep on account of lack of feed, in addition to which agricultural operations were severely handicapped by drought conditions. It is most unfortunate that adverse weather conditions have coincided with a period of market depression. Butterfat prices have been low, and, in addition, the output has been below normal owing to unfavourable climatic conditions. Hop crops have been light, and tobacco crops have been patchy and rather backward. There has been considerable overproduction of raspberries owing to the failure of the jam-factories to purchase as much as was anticipated, consequently many tons were allowed to rot. Orchardists have had quite a successful season, the crop being a record one. The local market has been weak, but prices for export fruit have been satisfactory.

Road communication to Karama and through the Buller Valley interrupted by the earthquake of 1929 has now been restored, although no doubt the road will be subject to slips for some years to come. There has been marked improvement of roads during recent years which has greatly facilitated communications with remote localities.

MARLBOROUGH.

(P. R. WILKINSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The climatic conditions in Marlborough have not been over-generous to the farming community during the past twelve months, and this, coupled with the low prices ruling for produce of all kinds, has had rather a depressing effect. Last winter was exceptionally dry, one period of over fifty consecutive frosts being recorded, and most parts of the district have suffered from drought conditions over the whole period under review. Spring growth came away late and there was a consequential shortage of feed at lambing-time when it was most needed, and ewes and lambs were backward as a result. Dairy stock also came in in poor condition in many parts of the district. The dry winter and spring permitted agricultural farmers to get an early start, and crops generally went in in splendid order, but the drought conditions which followed counteracted any benefit which should have accrued, and, generally speaking, crops were only fair.

The prevailing period of low prices has shown the farming community that to make ends meet they must produce more from the same area of land, and evidences of a forward movement in the direction of herd-testing, culling, top-dressing, flock-improvement, &c., are noted. Owing to the dry conditions prevailing, there is a shortage of feed in some parts of the district; this, together with poor prices, has induced many farmers to try to carry over their surplus stock; this will tax their holdings to the utmost capacity, and is probably more than the land can do—the wisdom or otherwise of this policy will be reflected in next year's returns. Certainly grass-management has been more carefully studied, and an increase in the making of ensilage has been noted where the rainfall has been better. The close of last year showed an all-round increase in output of most classes of produce, but it is not expected that this season's returns will show the same percentage of gain over all classes owing to the adverse weather prevailing.

A matter which requires attention is the question of access to several backblock settlers. The land cannot bear extra loading for that purpose, but it is considered that some effort should be made to utilize unemployed labour in that direction, and a careful examination is being made of the needs of the outlying districts, with a view to securing the assistance of the Public Works Department in connection therewith.

A thorough investigation of the pastoral runs in the Clarence Valley watershed, comprising an area of 300,000 acres, was made in March by the local advisory committee to the Lands Development Board in conjunction with officers of this Department and the Public Works Department. A separate report is being submitted on the possibilities of the area for closer settlement.

WESTLAND.

(T. CAGNEY, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—The weather conditions experienced during the past year have not been conducive to the best results being derived from farming, particularly during the latter part of the year, throughout which an unusual number of severe floods were experienced, causing considerable erosion of some of the best land, flooding, and loss of fencing. The number and the severity of the floods probably constitutes a record for Westland for many years past, although the total rainfall for the period might only be regarded as normal.

Coupled with the adverse weather conditions, the low prices for all classes of farm-produce has made the year a difficult one for the farmer. I am pleased, however, to be able to state that farmers generally in Westland are taking an optimistic view of the future, promoted no doubt to some extent by the fact that butterfat prices, though low, are firm, and also the generally improved tone of the wool-market towards the end of the period. Most farmers have been successful in conserving sufficient hay for winter feed, although some valuable crops were lost through bad weather, and in other cases the hay was gathered overripe owing to the same cause. Winter feed would be assured by the production of ensilage, which does not receive the attention it merits on the Coast.

It is encouraging to record that a keen demand still exists for farming-land of all classes. Evidence to this effect was disclosed in the number of applicants for the education reserve at Harihari which was subdivided and offered for selection during the year, forty-four applicants being admitted to the ballot for the seven subdivisions offered.