

FIELDS DIVISION.

REPORT OF J. W. DEEM, DIRECTOR.

GENERAL CONDITIONS.

The season 1931-32 has not been a very satisfactory one from the point of view of weather conditions. In most districts unseasonable weather was experienced off and on during the year, and what with droughts in certain districts, mainly in the South Island and in Hawke's Bay, farmers generally had a most trying time.

ARABLE CROPS.

The drought conditions which existed for the greater part of the year throughout Canterbury and North Otago resulted in the failure of many of the grain crops, and the yield of wheat threshed to date of writing is comparatively small as compared with last year. In all wheat-growing districts yields have been more or less adversely affected by dry weather, but South Canterbury suffered most of all. Actual figures are not yet available, but it is estimated that 276,000 acres of wheat were sown, as against an actual sowing of 252,547 acres in the previous season. The total yield of wheat for 1930-31 was 7,579,153 bushels, but, basing calculations on figures so far to hand, it is estimated that the 1931-32 season's crop will yield only 6,660,000 bushels. The Dominion yield per acre for 1930-31 season was 30.44 bushels per acre, while the estimated Dominion yield per acre for the 1931-32 season is 24.44 bushels. It is apparent that the total yield of wheat will be insufficient for Dominion requirements.

So far as the oat crop is concerned, it was estimated for 1931-32 that 329,000 acres were sown, as compared with 310,605 acres actually harvested in 1930-31. The estimated yields per acre from statistics gathered by the Government Statistician indicate that the yield for 1931-32 is approximately 6 bushels less per acre than for the previous season, the figures being 32.56 bushels per acre in 1931-32, against 38.74 bushels in 1930-31. The oats threshed for the five seasons ended 1930-31 averaged 26.57 per cent. of the total. Assuming that a similar proportion is threshed this year, the total yield of grain should be approximately 2,850,000 bushels, as against an actual yield of 3,376,609 bushels for the season 1930-31. Notwithstanding this prospective decreased yield, it may be found that the position in respect of oats and oaten chaff in the Dominion is quite satisfactory.

With regard to barley, it is estimated that 24,000 acres were sown in the 1931-32 season, as against an actual area harvested the previous season of 24,860 acres. As in the case of both wheat and oats, the yield per acre in the barley crop for 1931-32 is estimated to be several bushels per acre less than for the season 1930-31. Assuming that the percentage of the barley area threshed remains the same as last year, the total yield of grain should be approximately 530,000 bushels, as against an actual yield of 837,696 bushels for the season 1930-31.

The area under potatoes in 1931-32 was estimated at 22,500 acres, as against an area in the previous season of 28,484 acres. It is very difficult at time of writing to estimate the yield that will be obtained from the potato crop, but one is inclined to think that the quantity of table potatoes available from the 1931-32 crop will be ample for Dominion requirements.

ARTIFICIAL FERTILIZERS.

The top-dressing of pastures still continues to be viewed as one of the main features in pasture production. Unfortunately, the present financial difficulties of the farming community have stopped, at least temporarily, the expansion of top-dressing. Last year's figures showed a decided decrease in the quantity of fertilizer used as compared with the previous year. This year's figures, however, show an increase of between nine and ten thousand tons. This increase came about during the last two months of the financial year, a feeling apparently existing that there was no certainty of the Government subsidy being continued beyond 31st March. At the same time many dairy-farmers who failed to top-dress last year found that their returns during the season had fallen rapidly, and they realized that they must top-dress or go under. Benefits derived from this practice of top-dressing are of the greatest value, and the adequate carrying-out of it is a national necessity.

SECOND-GROWTH COUNTRY.

As was indicated in my last annual report, the experimental work conducted on hill country, particularly in Whangamomona County, which has been reverting to secondary growth, has been considerably curtailed. Much information of a valuable nature has been gathered from the work performed, and the continuance of this experimental work on the same scale as hitherto is not now considered necessary. Quite excellent work has been done on the demonstration farm run by the Lands Department in Whangamomona County under the provisions of the Deteriorated Lands Act.

INSTRUCTION IN AGRICULTURE.

The requests from the farming community for advice on agricultural matters of all descriptions are exceedingly large, and are stimulated by the difficult financial conditions now existing. Undoubtedly the advice and instruction imparted by the instructional staff of the Division has been the means of