

It is expected that settlers as a whole will have difficulty in meeting a year's charges.

Assistance to mortgagors of house properties has been necessary, and this has been mainly in the form of suspension of payment of principal and capitalization of arrears.

Hunter Soldiers' Assistance Trust Board.—The Board held three meetings during the year, and loans totalling £670 were granted to soldier settlers for stock and improvements.

Grants to the amount of £172 10s. were approved in the case of twenty-six orphan children of deceased soldiers.

TARANAKI.

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

The continued low price of butterfat has made the year a most disappointing and difficult one for the average dairy-farmer, the price dropping to 62s. in October, while the highest figure reached was 94s. in February. The majority of soldier settlers in the district are dairy-farmers, and those with small herds up to thirty have found it impossible to pay their way and meet charges. The farmers running fifty to sixty cows and over are in a much better position, and the majority of these should be able to carry on. The Department has met the position generously, and a considerable sum has been remitted in order to help those unable to pay. The milk-yield showed a slight fall in February due to the long dry summer, but later heavy rains have so transformed the pastures that it is anticipated that milking will be carried on much later than usual. Another factor in this connection has been the mild autumn. The longer milking-season should thus help the position somewhat.

On the other hand, the position of the sheep-farmer is more satisfactory. Although wool showed a sharp drop on the previous season's figures, the prices for fat and store lambs have been good, and the average sheep-farmer should be able to pay his way.

The Department is now farming six properties, and it is proposed to put these on the market at an opportune time. These are all sheep-farms. Two were reoffered during the year, but did not find a purchaser.

The position with regard to houses is much the same, but there seems a slight change for the better in regard to collection of charges. In a number of cases relief has been given by way of capitalization or extension of mortgage. The securities are generally well maintained, and a fair amount has been advanced for alterations and renovations.

WELLINGTON.

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

As the areas purchased for the settlement of discharged soldiers are to be found right throughout the land district the observations made with regard to general settlement apply equally to these tenants. Many of those following dairying for a living were detrimentally affected by the long spell of hot, dry weather during the summer months. The cows went right off, and returns were consequently considerably curtailed.

The drought has not affected the pastoralist to the same extent, but the satisfactory prices received for wool last year have not been maintained and difficulty has been experienced in meeting charges. A rise in prices for run stock, however, compensated matters to some extent.

Advantage has been taken in a number of cases of the Unemployment Board's various schemes, and a considerable area of scrub and gorse country has been cleaned up and sown down, and fencing has been erected in most cases to subdivide areas cleared. This has had the direct effect of increasing carrying-capacities.

In the Makowhai Settlement a very marked improvement will be effected as a result of drainage operations now being carried out with unemployed labour under the Camp Scheme.

NELSON.

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

The prevailing low prices for butterfat and wool makes it particularly hard for the soldier settlers to meet commitments and carry on their farming operations. A few, more favourably situated, who are able to go in for tobacco and hop growing are doing fairly well.

Relief by way of remission of rent and interest arrears has been given in a number of cases where it has been shown that the Crown is receiving a fair proportion of farm revenue.

Dwelling securities are generally in a fairly satisfactory position. A few discharged-soldier mortgagors who have been out of work have had relief by way of extension of term, but the majority of dwelling securities are fairly sound.

MARLBOROUGH.

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

The past season has been a very poor one for the majority of the soldier settlers as the greater number of them rely on dairying for their income and they have been doubly affected by the poor returns for butterfat and the decline in production owing to the very hot, dry summer.

In many cases the returns have only been sufficient to provide a bare living and essential working-expenses, and there has been little or no margin for meeting annual charges, and it is apparent that sympathetic consideration will have to be extended to many soldier settlers if they are to remain on their properties.