

TARANAKI.

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

The year started well climatically, but the early promise was not maintained. The winter was long and hard, and cold winds and squally conditions delayed the growth of grass. Spring was poor and late, and it was not until early summer that the pastures began to pick up. The rainfall was over 20 per cent. above the average, and the snowfall on Mount Egmont was abnormally high, a feature of this being a very heavy fall in November, a most unusual occurrence so late in the season. A heavy gale in February caused widespread damage to roads and bridges, also many houses were damaged and sheds and fences destroyed. There was practically no loss of stock, but the damage done to plantations and shelter-belts was very great, in some cases whole plantations being flattened out. Feed was scarce in winter and spring, and many a farmer had to use up his reserve stacks of hay or ensilage, while others had to purchase fodder to keep the stock alive. Consequently the stock generally came through the winter in poor condition, and production of butter-fat was below normal at the commencement of the new dairy season. However, later bountiful rains so restored the pastures that production showed a marked improvement, and at the end of the season the result was a surplus over the previous year.

The wool-clip was an average one, but prices have been much higher than last year, the average for fleece wool being about 8½d. The lambing percentage was low, due to the late spring and unseasonable weather. The export prices for fat lamb and mutton have been above last year's good prices, and this has been reflected in the prices for store sheep, particularly breeding-ewes; four-tooth ewes have sold as high as £1 8s. and two-tooth ewes as much as £2. Beef-prices have improved considerably, store bullocks this season selling up to £8 10s.

The wet season has suited the growing of root crops, although in some localities the white butterfly did a lot of damage. On the other hand, the weather seriously affected the harvesting of hay. Some districts report a marked reduction in the ragwort pest, while in other localities it is as bad as ever, owing to the neglect of settlers. More attention is being given to the top-dressing of pastures, and more basic slag has been used than for some years. Stock-losses were fairly high, owing to the long and severe winter, but there has not been much serious disease among the flocks, apart from a little temporary blindness among sheep and a few cases of facial eczema. At the close of the year prospects for stock are good as there is an abundance of feed, and stock should start the winter in good condition.

In the northern part of the district adjacent to Te Kuiti a start has been made with the reconditioning of abandoned farms to render them suitable for successful settlement, and up to date fourteen sections, aggregating 4,100 acres, have been handed over to the Land Development Branch.

Twenty-three abandoned sections, totalling 10,627 acres, were reselected during the year.

The revenue for the year showed a small increase on last year's good figures, which is very satisfactory, as it indicates that the position has been well maintained.

WELLINGTON.

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

At the beginning of the year under review the majority of Crown tenants were experiencing the effects of the long, dry summer upon their pastures. Many who had saved what in normal years would have been an ample supply of hay for winter feed were compelled to feed out the bulk of it in the autumn to keep their stock going. It is fortunate that in most districts the winter was not a severe one, and in spite of shortage of feed stock came through to the spring in fair condition. In most localities the spring and summer have been wet above the average, and while this has been conducive to a great growth of grass it was also the cause of delay in the early marketing of fat lambs. The wet season was responsible for a considerable amount of foot-rot and sheep-fly in parts of the district. In the Wanganui District the most severe floods for the past twenty years were experienced, while in the Wairarapa no less than eight floods occurred during the year, causing considerable loss to some of the settlers. River-erosion has been very noticeable, and as the result of this a considerable amount of money will require to be spent to protect property.

There has been increased use made of fertilizers for top-dressing of pastures, and renewal of grasslands generally is on the increase. More could be done in this direction, but farmers seem to be doing their best as far as their funds will permit. As more money becomes available it is felt that the "patching-up" of pastures will give place to more comprehensive schemes with regard to top-dressing.

It is pleasing to note that quite a number of tenants are giving attention to their buildings, and many homesteads are looking much brighter for having been painted. Ragwort, too, is receiving attention, and in some parts of the district a determined effort is being made to get rid of this pest. Those settlers who are dairying will come out about the same as last year, but the wool-growers have had a more encouraging year as regards prices obtained for their products.

The provisions of the Land Act relating to revaluation of Crown leases, which have been inoperative for some time, have been revived, and power has also been taken for the voluntary adjustment of mortgage liabilities. At the time of writing a considerable number of applications have been received from tenants and mortgagors for revaluations or adjustments, and these will be dealt with as speedily as possible.

There has been a good inquiry for farm properties during the year, and anything offered that showed a fair return was readily selected.