

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL.

Wellington, 15th July, 1936.

THE HON. THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE,—

I beg to submit the following report on the work of the Department for the year ending 31st March last, including the usual divisional reports, statement from the Phosphate Commission, and detailed reports on the activities of the Chief Chemist, the Plant Research Station, and the Veterinary Laboratory.

THE AGRICULTURAL AND PASTORAL POSITION.

Despite a markedly abnormal season over wide areas in the Dominion, farm production during the 1935-36 season has been most gratifying in that, in general, there has been a return to the high standard attained in the 1933-34 season. This is reflected in increases in the production of such major lines as butterfat, mutton, cereals, pork and bacon, while lamb-killings for export for the first nine months of the production-year ending 30th September are approximately equal to those of the corresponding period of the previous season. Further, in general the improved market position for the major exportable surpluses of farm-produce has been reflected in appreciated prices, this being especially marked in respect of wool. The joint effect of the maintenance of a highly satisfactory standard of production and of appreciated prices is partly to be seen in the fact that during the first five months of the current calendar year exports of merchandise have exceeded commodity imports in value by £13,583,065, as compared with £9,520,197 during the same months of 1935.

The weather varied greatly throughout the Dominion, and departures from normal conditions influenced production substantially. An outstanding feature in many districts was an unusually wet and consequently backward winter and spring. One result was a decline in dairy production during the early part of the season, the butterfat-production up to the end of November being over 170,000 cwt. less than in the corresponding period of the previous season. Another, and quite general, outstanding feature was the wet summer. One striking result was exceptionally heavy dairy production; the decrease of over 170,000 cwt. at the end of November had been turned into an increase of nearly 140,000 cwt. of butterfat at the end of March in comparison with corresponding periods of the previous season. In short, from December to March the amount of butterfat produced in 1935-36 season was approximately 35,000,000 lb. more than in the 1934-35 season, and as a result the returns of the dairy-farmers were approximately £2,000,000 greater. Incidentally, herein is provided a striking concrete illustration of how materially adequate summer feeding influences production and returns in dairying. The essential difference between the two seasons was in respect to the summer feed-supply, and, as usual, this difference was felt most acutely in February; the 1936 February dairy-produce gradings were greater than those of 1935 by the equivalent of over 90,000 cwt. of butterfat, of a value of roughly £500,000—surely a handsome return for one month for more efficient feeding.

The wet, cold spring followed by a summer of unusually abundant rainfall had a material influence also on fat-lamb production. This is indicated by the fact that while the number of lambs killed for export for the five months ending February, 1936, was almost 600,000 less than the number for the same period of the previous season, yet the corresponding numbers for the nine months ending 30th June are practically equal, being 8,766,757 in 1936 in comparison with 8,782,242 in 1935. Proportionately, the killings of sheep are essentially similar. In those districts which experienced the type of season under consideration, it was difficult to achieve proper control of pasture growth, and for the exceptional conditions obtaining many farms were understocked. Despite the abundance of summer feed, the reserves of hay and silage built up were not at all exceptionally heavy. In the first place, the broken summer weather did not favour successful hay-making, and, further, farmers being faced all along with the possibility, indeed the probability, of a dry spell during which the plentiful supply of pasture growth would be needed, and being unable to foretell the season, played for safety by keeping plenty of feed at hand on the pastures. The unusual abundance of feed in the fall of the year may have after-effects which warrant the consideration of sheep-farmers. In the first place, the conditions favoured the development of parasitic troubles, the control of which calls for special measures to which public attention has been directed by departmental officers; in the second place, because of the abundance of feed, many farmers are anxious about the over-fat condition of their ewes, which often is associated with trouble at lambing.