

DAIRY DIVISION.

REPORT OF W. M. SINGLETON, DIRECTOR.

THE SEASON.

Owing to the exceedingly dry summer and autumn of the preceding season, which occasioned a shortage of supplementary crops for winter use, followed by a very cold and wet winter and late spring, dairy herds were generally in poor condition at the commencement of the season. In South Canterbury, Otago, and Southland the shortage of feed was particularly acute, and this resulted in a considerable mortality amongst dairy stock. From November onwards conditions materially improved, and the growth of pastures has been phenomenal throughout the summer and autumn. In most districts earlier hay crops were successfully harvested, but considerable quantities of the later cuttings were completely spoiled owing to erratic weather conditions.

PRODUCTION.

Notwithstanding the lessened production of butter and cheese during the earlier part of the season due to the cold, late spring and consequent shortage of feed, the out-turn over the flush months owing to an abundance of succulent grasses was so phenomenally high that an increased production of butter-fat over the preceding year has to be recorded.

For the year ended 31st March, 1936, 145,990 tons creamery butter and 86,250 tons cheese came forward for grading, as compared with 132,415 tons butter and 90,049 tons cheese for the previous year, an increase of 13,575 tons butter (10·25 per cent.) and a decrease of 7,799 tons cheese (8·29 per cent.). Reduced to a butterfat equivalent, there is an increase of 9,610 tons, equal to 6·61 per cent.

CREAMERY BUTTER.

Of the 145,990 tons creamery butter which came forward for grading, 100,006 tons of which were graded at the Auckland port, 111,489, or 76·36 per cent., were classed as finest, 32,644 tons, or 22·36 per cent., as first, and 1,857 tons, or 1·27 per cent., as under first. By arrangement, the disposal of all butter of a lower quality than first grade through a channel which prevents it coming into competition with the higher grade has been continued. Quality has been well maintained, the average grade for the year being 93·158, as compared with 93·141 for the previous year. A more extended daily delivery of cream-supplies, together with a considerable improvement to buildings and plant, both at dairy factories and dairy-farms, and the amalgamation of dairy interests by reducing the number of factories in certain areas, have been influencing factors in maintaining and improving the quality of our creamery butter. Complaints have again been fairly numerous regarding the condition, on arrival in Britain, of some of the lighter packages of butter-containers owing to the warping of the timber, allowing the access of sawdust and dust to the butter, and to their susceptibility to mould-development. As a means of safeguarding the position the further use of the peeled type of Saranac container was prohibited as from 1st February, 1936.

WHEY BUTTER.

The quantity of whey butter graded totalled 1,412 tons, compared with 1,576 tons for the previous year, a decrease of 164 tons. Although the quality of this class of dairy-produce shows some improvement, considerable effort is still required towards a more efficient handling and treatment of the whey cream prior to churning, in order to ensure a quality more pleasing to purchasers. This class of butter is disposed of similarly to second-grade creamery.

CHEESE.

The quantity of cheese forwarded for grading totalled 86,250 tons, 17,191, or 19·94 per cent., of which were graded as finest, 66,252 tons, or 76·81 per cent., as first, and 2,807 tons, or 3·25 per cent., as under first.

Many abnormalities in manufacture, chiefly the sudden and persistent failure of starters, were experienced by cheesemakers during the season, but no effort was spared in endeavouring to deal with these problems as they arose. Notwithstanding these difficulties, a fair percentage of good, close-bodied cheese was manufactured, although uniformity of quality has not been quite so high as for the previous year, the average grades being 91·979 and 92·035 respectively.

A number of complaints were received from Britain concerning cracked crowns and mould-penetration. Special care in handling the cheese in the curing and packing rooms is desirable in order to avoid damage to lips and rinds, and thus tend to minimize the danger of mould gaining access to the cheese. Considerable attention has been given during the year to improving temperatures under which cheese are held prior to despatch to grade stores, and a number of companies have erected new curing-rooms, using cork slabs as insulating material. In addition, as a means of improving quality, a regulation was gazetted on the 12th September, 1935, which prevented the waxing of cheese in curing or packing rooms. Cheese made from pasteurized milk during the year totalled 87 per cent. and 60 per cent. were wax coated.