

TAIRAWHITI MAORI LAND DISTRICT.

The English translation of the word Tairawhiti—"all the land that slopes towards the Eastern Sea"—perhaps describes the situation and general aspect of the district's area better than the recitation of a detailed technical description of boundaries. Embracing all the country east of a line drawn roughly from Hicks Bay (near East Cape) along the Raukumara, Motu, and Huiarau Ranges, including Lake Waikaremoana, and then following the course of the Mohaka River to the Pacific Ocean, the district may be aptly named the "sunny province," or, as Maori dwellers so picturesquely described on the occasion of a recent visit of the Governor-General to the district to present the Ahuwhenua Trophy, "Morning dawns on the British Empire here in the lands you see before you. The sun sheds its freshest energy and glory on Tairawhiti, before departing to the lesser blessed lands to the West."

The Tairawhiti district, embracing the tribal territories of the Ngati-Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki, Rongowhakaata, and a section of the Ngati-Kahungunu peoples, may be regarded as the birthplace of the present policy of developing and settling the lands of the Natives and assisting them in their farming operations, a policy which has for its ultimate object the settlement of the Maori himself as a self-supporting member of the community.

The vesting of Native blocks in the East Coast Trust, the Native Trustee, and certain special trusts, created for the purpose of liquidating the affairs of Maori estates, led to the preservation and gradual development of certain of these areas in the Gisborne district. Prior to 1925 the incorporation of owners and consolidation of interests enabled large tracts of country to be brought into cultivation, and with limited assistance from State Departments and lending institutions sheep farming was engaged in by the Natives. The year 1925 marked a forward move when dairying operations were commenced in the Waiapu district with the establishment of a dairy factory at Ruatoria, but with the passing of development legislation in 1929 there still remained scattered but extensive interests of virgin or partially cultivated Native lands occupied by the owners.

The settlement of these Native lands by means of State development schemes was commenced in the East Coast district in January, 1930, when an area of 13,762 acres was gazetted as being subject to the development provisions of the Act of 1929, and the Mohaka scheme was undertaken. Following this scheme, other blocks were brought under development, and to-day there are eight of these schemes in operation for the settlement of lands owned by the Maoris, comprising a total area of 60,801 acres, a greater part of which is actually in the process of cultivation.

The returns for the past season have been excellent, both as regards cash receipts and volume of production, and show the healthy state of development in the district. The figures are:—

	£
Wool (for season)	13,229 (232,220 lb.).
Butterfat (Department's proportion)	5,536 (365,684 lb. gross).
Cattle (surplus sales)	1,645
Sheep	11,135
Sundries	2,413
Total	£33,958

This total, when compared with last year's figure of £23,610, shows an increase of £10,348, representing a 43 per centum rise. An analysis of the figures shows that wool proceeds have advanced by more than 300 per centum, and although the high prices realized last season admittedly account for a portion of this increase, the clip of 232,220 lb. was in excess of that produced in the previous season.

Housing receives more and more attention as time progresses, and this year sixteen new dwellings have been erected, whilst repairs and additions have been made to a number of existing homes. The policy view is that sufficient and healthy accommodation is one of the first steps required for building up a more virile and happier race, and a farmer provided with pleasant living conditions is at least started on the road towards becoming an asset to the community.

The character of the Maori farmer and his lack of training in modern farming methods make it more necessary as time goes on for the Department to exercise even closer supervision than has been carried out in the past. Instruction in the proper care of dairy herds, systematic culling of inferior stock, sanitary cow-shed operation, the judicious use of fertilizers, and general farm work is desirable to enable the Maori to become a qualified, self-reliant, and successful farmer.

Much of the labour cost of developmental work has been financed from Employment Funds, with the twofold result of keeping all available unemployed Maori labour in productive occupation and of helping the struggling farmer settler. For the year ended 31st March, 1937, funds expended from this source on development schemes amounted to £12,080, whilst 688 private contracts for work on other Native lands were subsidized by the Board of Native Affairs to the extent of £21,549.

As a result of the good season and the generally sound condition of settlers' accounts, rates amounting to nearly £1,000 were paid during the year. These payments have resulted in a better spirit of co-operation with the local bodies concerned, who have thus directly benefited. Appreciation has been expressed by the Wairoa, Waiapu, and Matakaoa Counties, and it is a definite move towards the easing of their vexed Native rating problem. The amount paid included Rabbit Board rates, which action represents a prudent policy, as all the schemes are in the rabbit-free area.

A pleasing result of the past season's activities was the award to Henry Dewes—one of the district development units—of the Bledisloe Cup, or Ahuwhenua Trophy, which was donated by Viscount Bledisloe for annual competition amongst all Maori farmers on the Department's development schemes throughout the Dominion. The cup was presented to Dewes by His Excellency the Governor-General at Tikitiki in March last, and the winning of this trophy by a member of the Ngati-Porou tribe has proved a great incentive to the Tairawhiti Maoris to become keen and industrious farmers.