

Te Kao Scheme.

The Te Kao lands, vested in the Tokerau District Maori Land Board, comprise the Parengarenga and Pakohu blocks in the North Auckland district. The Native settlement of Te Kao lies on the shores of the Parengarenga Harbour, about forty-five miles to the north-west of Awanui, and some twelve miles from the nearest European settlement. The population of Te Kao consists of 330 men, women, and children, who are occupying approximately 4,325 acres of land.

The Te Kao scheme is perhaps the most ambitious farming venture in connection with Native-land settlement in New Zealand. The land, except for a small area of alluvial flats and an area of sandy loam and peat swamp at the south end, is ordinarily considered to be unsuited for dairy-farming purposes. The contour of the land varies from small alluvial flats and raupo swamps to easy undulating ploughable land, rising to easy hills. On the eastern side of the settlement practically the whole of the area comprises "keho" land. The poor land, having mainly easy access, was developed in the early stages. Very little value can be placed on these areas, as their productive capacity is low.

The scheme was started by the Tokerau District Maori Land Board for the purpose of easing the dire distress that was existent at the end of 1924, when gum-digging had ceased at Te Kao. The Native population were living in crude corrugated-iron shacks, many without flooring or lining, the families were ill nourished, and the infantile death-rate was heavy.

Work was commenced by draining the raupo swamps, which were cleared, ploughed, and grassed. On the hill-slopes pastures were established, and live-stock was supplied to the settlers.

Owing to the isolation of the area, a store was established by the Board. It was followed by a lorry service for the conveyance of cream to Awanui, some forty-five miles distant. This service will be invaluable when the new development scheme, which it is proposed to commence at Ngataki, situated between Te Kao and Awanui, is started. A hall, with dining-room and kitchen attached, has been erected to supply the needs of the people. Housing conditions have been considerably improved, and the efforts of the Tokerau Board to change a destitute group of gum-diggers into a progressive community has been reasonably successful.

At the 31st March, 1937, the settlers' indebtedness to the Tokerau Board through advances and interest outstanding was £27,027. The net profit from the store trading resulted in £303, and from the cream lorry service £84. The season has been a fairly favourable one.

Butterfat production for last season amounted to 56,579 lb. There were 52 units under the scheme, of whom 39 were supplying cream to the dairy factory.

Unemployment labour has been utilized to complete the earth-work formation for stop-banking an area of foreshore affected by high tides only.

Sale-yards have recently been erected, and the disposal of surplus stock will be made easier by this acquisition.

Two new houses and one cow-shed were erected, and in the ensuing year an extensive plan of house-building and the construction of cow-sheds has been planned.

A detailed valuation of each section was made by a select committee representing the Valuation, Lands, and Native Departments, with a view to the taking-over of this scheme by the Board of Native Affairs. The future of the scheme at Te Kao is seriously menaced by the sand encroachment from the dunes on the western side of the settlement, and the fixing of these dunes and the stopping of sand-drifts is a matter requiring immediate active attention. Unless this is attended to immediately successful drainage on some of the best areas in the scheme will be seriously affected.

A commencement has been made with this work, and about 20 acres of marram grass has been planted.

The committee in its report has arrived at valuations which will allow the units to carry on, having regard in every case to the further allowance required to complete their proper housing and establishment. A considerable writing-off will require to be made, and this question is under review.

The special committee in its report, in commenting on future operations, states as follows:—

"It became apparent to the committee in the early stages of the investigation that certain units were endeavouring to farm areas of land entirely unsuited to successful dairying. In some cases the areas were too small, having regard to the nature, contour, and quality of the land to allow a reasonable standard of living ever being enjoyed by the units. In other cases, although the areas were larger, poor quality of the land and the comparative isolation of the areas, coupled with very poor living conditions, have been restrictive factors. We consider that these particular units have lost interest, although they have, in the main, been probably good workers in the past. An important point in future development is the capitalization of the cost of fertilizers over a period of two to three years."

In commenting upon the cattle, the committee state:—

"Generally speaking, we have found the quality and type of the dairy cattle at Te Kao to be surprisingly good, and we consider this reflects to the credit of the office or officers entrusted with the selection of the foundation stock. Although the quality and type of dairy stock are as mentioned, production of butterfat per cow is low, and this we attribute to lack of sufficient fertilizer on the pasture land, overstocking, and lack of knowledge on the part of individual settlers."

The following interesting comments of the committee indicate the value of the Te Kao scheme from a national point of view:—

"The maintenance of a daily cream service is essential for the scheme. The cartage of cream between Te Kao and Waipapakauri, forty-two miles, is carried out by this service, and this has enabled settlement of a large area of Crown land adjacent to the route. This settlement of Crown land must have been considerably delayed but for this Board service."

The Royal Commission of investigation set up in 1934 to inquire into the administration of Native Affairs, stated:—

"We think that on a reasonable estimate the State has been saved to the present time a very substantial sum through expenditure of funds of the Tokerau Maori Land Board."

The live-stock tallies at the 31st March were as follows: cows, 540; other dairy stock, 440; horses, 83; and a considerable number of pigs.