

EXPERIMENTAL FARMS AND AREAS.

The Division continues in its control of the work on the seven experimental and demonstration farms scattered throughout the Dominion. A great deal of the work being carried out on these farms is of an intensive technical nature and the work of the Division is performed in close co-operation with specialist officers engaged in grassland research. Again, there is the point that quite an appreciable amount of the work by way of experiments and demonstrations is on a scale and of such a nature that a trial with a co-operating farmer would not be possible. It is in work of this particular description that these demonstration farms are of real and definite value. The majority of the farms are what may be termed subsidized farms, and the Department each year, in consideration of the useful demonstration work being carried out on these places, makes an annual grant to the committee responsible for the running of each place.

There is, however, a need for further testing stations on experimental areas, particularly in the South Island, where many serious problems confronting the farmer require investigation. I am definitely of the opinion that the establishment of a first-class experimental station in the South would be of considerable benefit to the farming community and would afford the officers of my Division the opportunity of investigating many problems which at present are not being given the attention which they merit. Steps are being taken to investigate the facilities offering in the South for the establishment at an early date of such an experimental station, and it is expected that when a full report on the subject is placed before the Government the necessity of such a station will be recognized and adequate finance for its establishment on a proper scale will be forthcoming.

RUAKURA FARM OF INSTRUCTION.

Another extremely wet year was experienced. Intermittent rain fell right throughout the period, but the winter was fairly mild and feed was never actually short at any time. When spring growth commenced difficulty was experienced in controlling pasture-growth, and later on suppression of weeds was a very big problem. The previous year was considered bad for harvesting operations, but the one under review was, unfortunately, worse. Only one field of hay was harvested in good condition: the balance, if not somewhat spoilt by rain after it was cut, was over-ripe before it could be cut, on account of the weather. Haymaking operations extended over a very long period, commencing on the 10th December, 1936, and not being completed until the 17th March, 1937. Taking everything in, however, it may be considered that the farm had quite a successful year. A very pleasing feature was the renewed interest taken in the farm by the farmers. Actual visits of quite large parties of farmers were made, and, in addition, a large number of individual farmers visited the farm.

Following the usual practice, no annual sale of surplus stock was held on Ruakura, but all such stock was sold at the Combined Breeders' Sale held at Claudelands during September. There is no question that this method of the disposal of stock is less costly to the Department than the holding of an annual sale on Ruakura itself. At the sale twenty-one yearling and two-year-old bulls were disposed of at an average price of £16 4s. 7d. The demand for Ayrshire stock was exceptionally keen. Shorthorns were in fair demand, but Jerseys were not greatly sought after.

Pig-breeding was carried on on similar lines to previous years with the two breeds maintained at Ruakura—viz., Berkshires and Tamworths. A phenomenal demand has existed right throughout the year for Berkshires, but there has not been a very great demand for Tamworths. The average prices realized for pedigree pigs during the year were quite good and the average price for 100 Berkshires, including boars, sows, and weaners, was £6 3s. 7d. For Tamworths the average price for boars and sows was £7 0s. 4d. In this latter breed only fifteen head were sold as against 100 in the Berkshire breed.

With respect to dairy stock, the year commenced with a total of 131 cows in milk and finished on the 31st March with 130 cows in milk. Fifteen cows and heifers were placed under C.O.R. test conditions and twenty-four under O.H. test conditions during the year. The butterfat sold realized approximately 3d. per pound more than for the previous season.

The alterations which were carried out at the old cow-shed just prior to the end of the 1936 winter had the effect of making a great difference to the time and convenience in handling the herd at each milking. This is all to the good.

In the sheep section the flock sheep did exceptionally well, and 107 per cent. of lambs were tailed. The position with regard to fattening the lambs was not, however, as satisfactory as could be wished, as owing to the long feed and the cool weather conditions the lambs were late in maturing and consequently were later than usual in being ready for killing.

As a result of the decision to centre a large amount of experimental work at Ruakura, a greater general interest is being taken in the activities of the farm, which should play a most important part in investigating many important problems. Amongst the work in progress are pasture-top-dressing problems of the Waikato which are being investigated by way of mowing trials, pig-feeding trials, and ragwort investigation. In addition, a number of small trials have been carried out with fodder crops and cereals, and preparations are being made to investigate the Waikato feed-flavour problem and sterility in bulls.