

FIELDS DIVISION.

REPORT OF R. B. TENNENT, DIRECTOR.

THE SEASON.

It is usual for the general weather conditions over a full year to vary considerably from district to district throughout New Zealand, and the year ended 31st March, 1939, was no exception. In brief, the outstanding features were as follows in the areas under the control of the four Fields Superintendents:—

Northern Half of North Island.—The winter of 1938 was wet and the following spring late in consequence. The late summer and autumn were dry. The rainfall in October was only 1.28 in., and this prevented a normal flush of grass for hay and silage making. Dry weather in February and March, 1939, caused pasture growth to dry up, with a consequent fall in dairy-produce production. Most farmers will enter the winter period of 1939 poorly supplied with supplementary feed.

Southern Half of North Island.—The year has been notable for a very wet autumn and winter with disastrous floods in Northern Hawke's Bay. High temperatures in April and May in the west-coast districts, combined with humid conditions, provided a satisfactory spring and early summer. The late summer and autumn have been very dry.

Northern Half of South Island.—The past year can be said to have been unsatisfactory from a farming point of view. Over a considerable part of the period there was excessive rainfall and the soil became much too wet. This period of high rainfall was followed by a long period of dry and windy weather during the late summer and autumn.

Southern Half of South Island.—The season from a production point of view proved to be better than the previous one in that, generally speaking, conditions favoured the farmer more. At the present time dairy stock are in better condition than is usual at this period of the year, and with the exceptionally good supplies of winter fodder available stock should winter in very good condition.

FLOOD DEVASTATION.

Severe flood damage and extensive silting on pasture lands occurred in parts of Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay in the autumn of 1938. The Esk Valley, north of Napier, and adjoining valleys were covered with several feet of sandy silt. Officers of the Division were responsible for the purchase and distribution of grass-seed and fencing-materials for the rehabilitation of the devastated farms.

ARABLE CROPS.

The wheatgrower in Canterbury had a very trying time during the year. The high rainfall of April, 1938, made the soil so wet that cultivation for wheat-sowing could not be undertaken. The following two months were so changeable that the sowing of wheat was greatly interfered with, and it was not until August that sowing to any extent could be carried out. The final results of the wheat crop have been unsatisfactory, as yields have not nearly been up to expectations. "Take-all" was prevalent in Mid-Canterbury and North Canterbury, and in some instances the crops were not worth harvesting. In North Otago wet conditions interfered to a certain extent with sowing-operations of both autumn and spring sown crops, but despite this wheat crops in this area were, generally speaking, very good.

Oat crops have done very well, being clean and relatively free from rust attack.

With respect to yields, that portion of the wheat crop threshed during the months January–February, 1939, according to returns received from threshing-mill operators up to 24th March, showed that 63,211 acres of wheat threshed returned a total yield of 1,849,546 bushels, the average yield per acre being 29.26 bushels. This actual per-acre yield is lower than the estimated yield of 32 bushels. This, combined with the fact that the area sown to wheat for 1938–39 was less than the previous year, must result in appreciably less wheat being available. For the season 1937–38 the actual total area of wheat threshed was 185,900 acres, and this, with an average per-acre yield of 32.50 bushels, gave a total yield of 6,043,000 bushels. For 1938–39 the estimated area of wheat for threshing is 184,700 acres, but, as indicated above, the per-acre yield from that portion of the crop already harvested is 29.26 bushels; thus not only have we a smaller total area, but the yield per acre is practically $3\frac{1}{4}$ bushels less.

Like the wheat crop, the oat crop is also smaller both in yield per acre and total area when compared with the previous year. For 1937–38 the total actual area in oats was 289,763 acres, while the estimated area for 1938–39 is 263,000 acres. The actual yield in 1937–38 was 45.60 bushels per acre, against a per-acre yield for 1938–39, as far as that part of the crop already threshed has disclosed, of 37.09 bushels per acre.

The barley crop, estimated at 40 bushels per acre, is expected to yield 2 bushels to 3 bushels per acre less than last season's harvest produced. If in 1938–39 a similar average proportion of the total barley area is threshed, as was the case in the previous five seasons, the total yield should be approximately 990,000 bushels, compared with an actual yield of 1,085,950 bushels for 1937–38. The total actual area in barley in 1937–38 was 31,604 acres, while for 1938–39 the total area is estimated at 33,700 acres.

POTATOES.

The area in potatoes in 1937–38 was actually 23,090 acres, but the estimated area for 1938–39 is 20,000 acres, a decrease of 3,090 acres. The planting of this crop was delayed on account of bad weather, and early spring conditions were not conducive to quick growth. However, considering the seasonal conditions, crops are relatively good and the yields should be satisfactory, although not as heavy as the previous season.