

FIELDS DIVISION.

REPORT OF R. B. TENNENT, DIRECTOR.

THE SEASON.

Climatic conditions throughout the Dominion varied to a considerable degree during the year ended 31st March, 1940. For the first three months the weather was particularly mild, but during July and August intensely cold and wintry conditions were experienced, with snow in some parts of the North Island where it had not hitherto been known to fall, and in the South Island a good many sheep were lost. Following the Dominion-wide severity of weather in these winter months there occurred extremes of variation in different districts. In the northern half of the North Island an abundance of rain during the summer and autumn was most favourable for growth of pasture, and food for stock was in plentiful supply. In the southern half of this Island, however, east-coast districts experienced very dry conditions, while in west-coast areas, and particularly in Taranaki, the rainfall was above normal. A similar variation of climate is recorded in South Island districts. Nelson had an abundance of moisture, whereas conditions in Marlborough were dry. Canterbury also had a very dry summer and autumn, while across the ranges in Westland the season was a very wet one. In North Otago the weather resembled that of Canterbury, while in South Otago and Southland it was rather too wet, the excessive rain causing rank growth, also making harvesting-conditions difficult.

ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIMARY PRODUCTION.

In the course of the year just closed the National Council of Primary Production was established. As an organization this Council is headed by the Minister of Agriculture as chairman, and includes representatives of the primary producers, workers, organizations related to primary production, and the Department of Agriculture. In association with the Council are a parliamentary advisory committee and a technical advisory committee. There are also commodity subcommittees representing the various primary-production industries.

The District Councils of Primary Production, comprising representatives of workers, farming, commercial and departmental interests, deal with problems affecting the local conditions and put into effect the recommendations of the National Council. Co-ordination is effected through the district and local organizers, who are members of the Fields Division, and receive instructions through the Director of Primary Production, who is also Director of the Fields Division.

The function of the Council is to advise the Government through the Minister of Agriculture (the Minister in charge of primary production) on the specific direction of farm production in order to maintain, increase, or to modify primary production.

ARABLE CROPS.

In Canterbury the main crop of wheat was sown under ideal conditions and came away well. The acreage sown, however, was not sufficient, and when war broke out an appeal was made for additional areas of spring wheat to be sown. Farmers made a wonderful response to this appeal, but dry weather was against the best results. On the whole, however, these spring-sown crops were not poor, and added many thousands of bushels to the wheat yield. The good results are attributable to a timely rainfall experienced in Canterbury towards the end of November. "Take all" and foot-rot was noticed in places, but the season passed with much less disease than usual. The wheat this season was in most cases hard and generally of good quality, but, with the type of season experienced, thin and pinched grain was met with in the dry light-land areas. It is estimated that at least 70 per cent. of the wheat on the plains of Canterbury was harvested with the header this season, and one outstanding feature of the harvest was the fact that from Marlborough to South Canterbury the harvesting operations were in hand at the same time. This is unusual, as South Canterbury is generally at least a fortnight later than the northern district.

As regards yields, that portion of the wheat crop harvested during the months January-March, 1940, according to returns received from threshing-mill operators up to 22nd April showed that 191,712 acres of wheat threshed returned a total yield of 5,917,258 bushels, the average yield per acre being 30.87 bushels. This actual yield is lower than the estimated yield of 33 bushels per acre. For the season 1938-39 the actual total area of wheat threshed was 189,281 acres, and this, with an average per-acre yield of 29.40 bushels, gave a total yield of 5,564,136 bushels. For 1939-40 the estimated area of wheat for threshing is 253,700 acres, and, as indicated above, the per-acre yield from that portion of the crop already harvested is 30.87 bushels. Thus a considerably larger quantity of locally grown wheat will be available in the Dominion this year.

The oat crop on the whole was satisfactory, although a slightly decreased area was sown. The crop made good growth in the South Island districts where it is grown, but broken weather was experienced about harvest-time and some crops were rather badly lodged. The area from which oats were threshed for the previous five seasons averaged 20 per cent. of the total area under crop. Assuming that a similar proportion is threshed this year, the total yield of grain should be approximately 2,240,000 bushels, as against 2,604,817 bushels for the season 1938-39. The estimated area in oats for 1939-40 is 254,000 acres.