

eradicating the rabbit pest. Further Boards are in process of formation, and if this trend is continued there should eventually be a marked decrease in the pest. With very few exceptions Boards have adopted what is known as the "killer" policy, and this system of operation has proved to be most effective and is now regarded by all concerned and interested in the destruction of the pest as yielding the best results. Boards have continued to do good work even under the handicap of shortage of suitable labour, strychnine, rabbit-traps, &c. Subsidies paid to Boards on rates collected during the year amounted to £54,615, compared with £29,705 in 1941, which is striking evidence of the support given to Boards by the Government in their work of rabbit-destruction.

The Rabbit-skins Levy Committee in Dunedin has continued to operate, and it is clear that the payment of a subsidy on milky does and small unmarketable skins has been of material assistance in keeping in check the rabbit population, as the subsidy has encouraged the destruction of rabbits during the spring and summer months, when normally they would not be destroyed.

It is apparent that the high prices ruling for skins are still retarding the work of extermination, and until this problem is solved—possibly by the extension of Rabbit Boards—little progress will be made in a large number of districts outside of Board control in eradicating the pest. Rabbit-skins exported last year totalled 17,670,078, which gives some indication of the extent of the pest.

With the cessation of hostilities resulting in a greater volume of labour becoming available, and ample supplies of strychnine now on hand, there is no reason why a greater and more sustained effort should not be made in eliminating the rabbit pest.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

The Department has continued to give financial assistance to local authorities for noxious-weeds work, particularly ragwort, and, having regard to the shortage of labour and the difficulty encountered in obtaining adequate supplies of Atlacide and sodium chlorate, quite effective work has been carried out during the year. Beyond the efforts of County Councils in controlling the spread of ragwort, there is no appreciable reduction in other classes of noxious weeds—blackberry, gorse, variegated and Californian thistle, &c.—on farming-lands, and here again effective work has obviously been retarded by the scarcity of labour and suitable weedicides. With an improvement in the supply position, however, a greater concentration of effort in dealing with the noxious-weeds problem may be expected—in fact, is necessary—if our primary production is to be maintained. Thirty-two counties have now taken over the administration of the Act, but they are also confronted with the shortages referred to earlier.

Weeds on unoccupied Crown and Native lands have been kept under control.

During the year a special Noxious Weeds Committee was set up by the Hon. Minister of Agriculture to study the position generally and to bring forward recommendations as to ways and means of more effectively dealing with noxious weeds in the future. The Committee consists of representatives of interested State Departments, Federated Farmers, and the New Zealand Counties Association, and a report is expected to be forthcoming shortly after a further meeting scheduled to be held in July, 1946.
