

In Taranaki, largely on account of climatic reasons, cattle-raising, sometimes with a few sheep, and eventually, wherever the country is suitable, dairying, combined with pig-farming for the bacon-factories, &c., is the class of farming looked upon with most favour by our settlers. For some reason or other, except in the southern portion of the district, sheep-farming is not resorted to. For this reason the fall in the price of wool has not seriously affected the prosperity of Taranaki. Speaking, therefore, in the broadest sense, the farming community generally are in a prosperous and sound condition. It is essentially a country of small holdings; those in the older settled districts having creameries and factories close at hand, whilst the settler farther back has to put up with the separator, and still farther back has to content himself with the raising of stock, but in a more or less degree the wave of prosperity, so to speak, reaches all.

I now come to the question of road access, and this, or rather the want of it, is the burning question of all our pioneer settlers who have to earn their bread from the soil. Very few grumble at the rents they have to pay, but they do make themselves heard in the matter of roads; and the majority of them would willingly pay double their rents if from the first they had access to their holdings by a dray-road, for the simple reason that the land at once becomes productive, and simultaneously the factory, school, &c., and the other necessities of life come within reasonable reach and gladden the settler's heart. As to how road access is to be obtained is the absorbing question. I feel sure, as suggested by Mr. Barron, Crown Lands Ranger, a judicious capitalising of "thirds" and the raising of loans under the Loans to Local Bodies Act, paying interest out of "thirds" for the first fifteen years of the loan when the settlers really need help, would, together with the Government loaning, afford a very large measure of relief. This was largely done in the Wellington District, and if I remember rightly the Salisbury and Deleware Blocks in the Upper Pohangina are cases in point. In addition to this I feel that a very large number of settlers would be willing to help themselves if the means of doing so were placed before them. Numbers that I have spoken to recognise that a rate for a loan would often pay them ten fold in the extension of their milking season alone, which would be practically doubled. What I mean is that a settler now often through bad roads cannot take his milk to a factory before December, and ceases doing so in February or March, whilst with a good road he could start in August and end in May.

Whilst on the road question, I have earnestly to place before you the great advantage to settlement that would be achieved by the completion of the Moki and Stratford-Ohura Roads: in the former only ten miles and a half to make it open for bridle traffic are required, and on the latter eight miles. It seems a pity that for two great arterial roads like these recourse should have to be made to anything but dray-roads, but even a horse-road is preferable to none, and at any rate it opens up the wilderness. It gives those looking for land a chance of seeing what the country is made of, and to present and future settlers it at once brings the markets of the outer world within payable reach of them, making their burdens and lives easier, turning so to speak a current of civilisation into their midst, and welding together wider communities of interest.

Regarding new lands to be opened during the coming year, these will probably be as follows: Ohura and King-country, about 110,000 acres; Upper Tongaporutu, about 19,000 acres; Whangamomona, about 36,000 acres; Upper Whenuakura, about 12,000 acres; miscellaneous sections, about 12,000 acres; or a total of 189,000 acres, which with lands now open, 99,648 acres, will make a grand total available during the year of 288,648 acres. The most important of these I think will be the Ohura country lands, on which I have specially reported on more than one occasion, and which I need hardly refer to here beyond remarking that I think there is a great future for this part of the country, and that the Wanganui River will form an important factor in its future development. With a steamer landing-place about the mouth of the Ohura, and a through road to Ongarue (half of which is now made), it will create an entirely new community, and bring into profitable use a quarter of a million acres of Crown and Native land of a low elevation, at present practically a *terra incognita*, on which only herds of wild horses and cattle now roam. In any case roads to open up our own Crown lands will have to be taken from Ongarue to within a few miles of the mouth of the Ohura, and in the combined interests of settlement and the tourist traffic it would appear that the through connection is essential, particularly as the road-construction will be comparatively easy.

Personally I feel that a larger Wanganui district will eventually be opened on the northern side of the Wanganui River than at present exists on the southern side, and that the utility of the river as a highway to the back country has not as yet emerged from its primary stages.

#### Office-work.

The clerical staff has been fully employed during the year. The subjoined list gives an indication of the work for the year: Correspondence—inward and outward letters, circulars, &c., 13,145; applications for land, 475; reports to Advances to Settlers Office, 67; cheques drawn for wages of survey parties, &c., 570; vouchers dealt with, 585; transfers recorded, 146; receipts for rent and refunds, 4,215; provisional titles prepared, 87; cards furnished to Auditor, 114; local bodies' proposals dealt with (covering an expenditure of £1,087 11s. 11d.), 19: total, 19,423, an increase of 3,100 over last year's work.

JAMES MACKENZIE,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

#### WELLINGTON.

*Lands opened for Sale and disposed of.*—The Crown lands offered for sale or selection during the year amounted to 40,496 acres, to which has to be added the area 28,176 acres already open