

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRIES, AND COMMERCE FOR
THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1916.

Wellington, 26th June, 1916.

The Hon. Ministers of Agriculture and of Industries and Commerce.

I BEG to submit the annual reports of the Department for the year ending 31st March, 1916. In accordance with the desire of the Government I have made my own report as brief as is compatible with a reasonable statement of the Department's operations and prospects, and I have impressed upon my officers the need of doing likewise. The documents referred to comprise the reports of the following officers: (1) The Secretary (director-general of the Department); (2) the Director of the Live-stock Division; (3) the Director of the Fields Division; (4) the Director of the Horticulture Division; (5) the Director of the Dairy Division; (6) the Biologist; and (7) the Chemist.

As usual, my report deals almost entirely with the Department's own operations, it being understood that the more general aspects of agriculture and of the allied industries and commerce will be dealt with in the Ministerial statement.

The year's work has naturally been considerably interfered with by the existing war-conditions, and at times we have been hard put to it to keep the whole of the usual services going smoothly. This has, however, been accomplished, thanks to the special efforts of the staff, who have almost without exception striven their utmost to carry on the duties of those of their comrades who have joined the Expeditionary Forces.

Many of the officers of this Department might with a good deal of justification have arrived at the conclusion that they could serve the Empire as well by remaining at their posts as by enlisting, but nevertheless the Department has every reason to be proud of the number of its members who have gone to the front or into camp with a view to active service. To their present and prospective representatives in the firing-line the remainder of the staff wish all possible good fortune during absence, and a safe return to the great work in which they were formerly engaged. To the relatives of those of our comrades who have laid down their lives for their country and for the principles of right and liberty we extend our deep and respectful sympathy.

The work of the instructional officers has in many respects been hindered by the high prices of implements, fertilizers, fencing-material, &c. The shortage of labour, especially for bush-felling, has also made itself felt. In consequence these officers have at times had to seriously modify the advice they would like to have given to farmers.

Shortage of labour has also affected to some extent the control of the rabbit and noxious-weeds pests, and as the last two seasons have been highly favourable to the increase of rabbits owing to the absence of the usual drowning of the young during heavy rains and floods, there is no doubt that in some districts both rabbits and noxious weeds have made headway, although in other parts some fine work has been done, both pests having been held well in check and noxious weeds having been appreciably reduced in those districts where serious efforts have been put forward by the settlers. It seems necessary to warn settlers that, although the Inspectors will, as in the past, take the circumstances of each case into consideration before drastically enforcing the Rabbit Nuisance or the Noxious Weeds Acts, yet the Department cannot in any circumstances allow these pests to be unnecessarily neglected, and those farmers who may feel disposed to shelter behind the war-conditions must recognize that unless Inspectors are satisfied as to the genuineness in each case of the plea put forward, the Acts must be as fully enforced as is reasonable in each case.

The Inspectors of Stock are now prepared as far as possible to give settlers advice in regard to the production, classing, packing, &c., of wool, also in connection with the dipping of their flocks, and those whose experience in such matters is limited may be strongly advised to consult their local Inspector in regard to such matters.

The Director of the Dairy Division in his annual report writes very strongly on the subject of the quality of some of the milk or cream delivered at the dairy factories and of some of the butter or cheese manufactured. He states that on the whole results in these directions are not as good as formerly; in other words, that the quality of our dairy-produce is as a whole in grave danger of deteriorating. This, I need scarcely point out, is a matter of cardinal importance to the Dominion, and I would therefore ask that the most careful consideration should be given to the remedy suggested by the Director—namely, that the Department should cease to perform the grading of dairy-produce free of charge, but should impose a fee upon the factories sufficient to cover the cost of this service, and that the money thus saved to the Government should be devoted to increasing the staff of officers available for giving instruction to the milk-suppliers in regard to the production and treatment of milk. I regard this as one of the most important matters requiring consideration in connection with the agricultural industries of New Zealand at the present time.

It has been decided by the dairy factories to form a co-operative company to manufacture rennet. This seems to be a very wise move, and it is to be hoped that complete success will attend the effort. To enable this to be attained it is essential that the farmers should supply the required number of calves' vells, and I am confident that the appeal to milk-suppliers, &c., in this connection will not be in vain.

An important development during the year has been the spread of the system of pasteurizing milk for the manufacture of cheese, a process that assists materially in the production of a good and uniform flavoured article. The system can now be confidently recommended.

During the year Mr. J. Brown, B.Sc. Ag., N.D.A., has been appointed Director of the Fields Division, in place of Mr. E. Clifton, who has been acting as New Zealand Commissioner at the San Francisco Exhibition, and who will shortly retire from the Service owing to having reached the regulation age. Mr. Clifton's name will long be held in grateful remembrance by the farmers of New Zealand, especially in connection with the eradication of scab in the early days, the development of the Ruakura Farm of Instruction, and the campaign for the general utilization of lucerne. Mr. Clifton will take with him on his retirement the best wishes of the Department and the farmers for a long and useful autumn of his days.