

LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS.

Several local problems, including the North Auckland gum lands, the pumice lands of the Taupo Plateau, and the depleted country of the Mackenzie and Central Otago Plains, have been under investigation for the past few years.

Owing to considerations arising out of the war, no work has been undertaken in furtherance of these investigations during the year except to obtain some grazing records from plots previously established. Generally speaking, it has now been fairly well decided, as the result of work previously undertaken, as to which the various processes of treatment, cropping, and grassing that should be accorded to the respective areas. In future work ought to be in the direction of abandoning to a large extent the small trial-plot system in favour of the adoption of a system of farming on a scale which would permit of an adequate income to the settler, the object being to collect economic data for the information of intending settlers. In other words, the work hitherto undertaken has indicated possible lines of improvement of each area and modes of farming them, and it now remains to decide by actual trial which system will pay, and which will pay best.

ADVICE TO FARMERS.

In connection with the advisory work and other activities which bring its officers into intimate contact with the farming community, this Division is in a position to realize very to face. To produce the maximum result with the minimum expenditure he must carefully consider and give due place to a multitude of factors, and in this connection the services of the Division's officers have been very freely extended during the year. From the headquarters of the Division, as well as from the experimental farms and from district offices, an immense amount thoroughly the many exigencies and difficulties which a striving agriculturist is called upon of correspondence relating to crop-production has been maintained with the agricultural public, and yet the demand for information is far from being satisfied. Throughout New Zealand there exists a keen desire on the part of farmers to have more expert instructors in their midst. This is a desire which every effort should be made to meet.

At headquarters and throughout the country a very considerable share of the duties imposed by this service has been sustained by the Agriculturist, Mr. A. McTaggart, M.S.A. He has lectured on up-to-date agricultural methods to appreciative bodies of farmers in practically all sections of New Zealand. Instructive articles on various agricultural subjects have been written by him from time to time for the *Journal of Agriculture*, and advice to farmers by letter and by personal interview have been freely accorded. He has also conducted soil and limestone surveys in various parts of the Dominion, and is to be credited with the discovery of extensive deposits of soft limestone the importance of which to the agricultural community cannot be overestimated.

While particular reference is made to the work of this officer, who has commenced what we hope will prove a very honourable and useful career in his chosen profession in New Zealand, it is not in the least intended to underrate the faithful and ungrudging services which has been rendered for years to the Department and the country by the Fields Instructors and Inspectors throughout New Zealand. In connection with the experimental and advisory work in particular, Fields Instructors Macpherson and Baylis, with their assistants Messrs. McCulloch and Dibble, have done pioneer service, and have contributed in no small measure to the progress of arable-land farming in the Dominion.

FERTILIZERS.

The number of vendors who have registered brands is 400. During the year thirty-six samples of fertilizers were taken for analysis.

EDUCATIONAL DISPLAYS.

During the year displays were made at Invercargill, Dunedin, Palmerston North, Christchurch, Hawera, and smaller displays at Tapanui, Blenheim, and Westport. These displays, besides being general agricultural demonstrations, set forth the activities of the Department. Farmers are keenly interested in the exhibits, and their educational value is beyond question.

RABBITS AND NOXIOUS WEEDS.

Rabbits.

Unfortunately rabbits have shown a decided increase during the past twelve months. This is particularly noticeable in many parts of the South Island, where, owing to the very dry season and absence of rains, breeding-conditions have been most favourable. Scarcity of labour brought about by war conditions has to some extent nullified the efforts of farmers in coping with the pest, although this cannot be taken as a general reason for the increase. In some instances a few unscrupulous persons have taken this reason as an excuse, and have taken absolutely no steps whatever to destroy.

In the North Island, although increases have been noted in some localities, the position is not nearly so serious as in the South. The country operated upon by the East Coast Rabbit Board is in a very clean condition. In certain parts of the Auckland Province local committees, formed for the purpose of taking simultaneous and constant action against the rabbit, have done much good. These committees are practically all in the district controlled by Fields Inspector Rowan, Auckland, and that officer is to be congratulated on the enthusiasm he has aroused amongst settlers and the consequent good work done.