

In several localities there may occur some shortage in winter feed, as, owing to the exceptionally dry summer and a consequent scarcity of feed, stockowners have in many instances been obliged to make big inroads on their turnips and feed which had been provided for winter use.

Crown tenants generally are continuing to develop their holdings as well as present circumstances permit. The Crown Lands Rangers' reports go to show that on some of the rougher sections where the tenants are absent on service fern is encroaching on the grassed land.

The statutory reports received from the Crown Lands Rangers for the year show as follows: Value of improvements required, £96,231; value of improvements effected, £236,733.

Though in more recent years single men have been largely excluded from Crown-land ballots through the operations of the preference clauses of the Land Acts, over 150 of our tenants, mainly single men of military age, have voluntarily enlisted for service; and where circumstances warrant it every consideration has been shown these men by the Land Board in the abatement of residence and improvement conditions, also exemption from payment of rent whilst on active service.

Bushfelling has been practically at a standstill during the year both on Crown lands and lands held under freehold title. Private owners have paid up to £2 5s. per acre for felling. Such a heavy initial cost added to the high price for grass-seed, labour, fencing-wire, &c., renders bushfelling, especially in the case of poorer and rougher classes of bush land, almost prohibitive.

Revenue.—There has been a shrinkage of £2,572 in the revenue of the year compared with the previous year's figures, which is accounted for mainly by the falling-off in the number of conversions to fee-simple. On the other hand, the position of tenants with regard to rental arrears has improved, there being forty-six defaulters less, representing £585 less, than the figures at the 31st March, 1916.

West Coast Settlement Reserves.—During the past six months the Crown has acquired by purchase from the Native owners over 14,600 acres in the Opunake, Waimate, and Kaupokonui Survey Districts, known as the West Coast Settlement Reserves, most of which is already held by tenants under the provisions of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Acts. As the Native Land Amendment Act, 1913, confers on the tenants a right of acquisition of reversion from the Crown either in fee-simple or under renewable lease, it is anticipated that the majority of them will in the near future avail themselves of securing a title under either tenure direct from the Crown.

New Lands.—The proposals for dealing with new lands during the coming year include the offering, chiefly for discharged soldiers, of an area approximating 20,000 acres partly in the Waro Survey District and in other localities in the northern end of the district. In the south part of the district about 600 acres, recently acquired from the Native owners, will also be offered for selection in suitable areas.

WELLINGTON.

(G. H. M. McCURE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The year has been profitable for all classes of farm-produce, prices for butter-fat, wool, and stock still keeping up, though the exceptionally dry summer affected the dairying returns. White crops were good, but turnip and rape did not turn out well. On light lands pasture was badly burnt up, but on papa soils feed was not much affected. Settlers have learnt a lesson from this, and will in future pay more attention to conservation of water. The burns of felled bush were generally successful, and the grass-seed has taken well. The necessity for growing more wheat and oats has impressed itself on the farmers, and more attention will no doubt be given to this in view of the conditions prevailing in the United Kingdom. In newly settled districts the roads are gradually improving, lending themselves to the use of motor transport, enabling farmers to attend to their business with an economy in time. The shortage of labour caused by men serving with the Expeditionary Force, coupled with the high prices ruling for fencing and other materials, has retarded improvements on newly settled farms. It is estimated that 150 Crown tenants are serving the Empire in the Force, and the sons of many have given their services and lives in the great national struggle.

The area notified open for application was 57,684 acres, of which 49,198 acres were for selection by discharged soldiers. In addition an area of 19,387 acres was dealt with under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and of these areas 34,937 acres remained open for application at the close of the year.

The Land Board held sixteen meetings, of which four were special meetings to deal with lands set apart for settlement by discharged soldiers. At the ordinary meetings 287 transfers were consented to, showing a falling-off of nine on last year's dealings.

The North Waimarino Improved Farm Settlement may now be regarded as part of the ordinary tenures, as most of the eighty holdings are well improved, and only nineteen settlers have not taken up their licenses, principally because sawmilling operations are not quite completed.

It is satisfactory to report that arrears of rent are gradually being reduced, and the amount owing is £1,014 less than it was last year.

During the year four leases of education-endowment lands expired, and the lessees were granted renewals, the aggregate rental being increased from £19 7s. 10d. to £75 18s. per annum.

Inspections made by the Rangers show that the conditions of occupation as to cultivation, noxious weeds, &c., are in the main being satisfactorily complied with.