

Lack of supplies and prohibitive prices of wire netting has been another unfavourable circumstance in connection with rabbit-control.

Pollard and oats phosphorized are still the principal poisoning-means used, but carrots and oats poisoned with strychnine have been used with fairly effective results. Failures in poisoning are mostly due to the want of system and thoroughness in carrying out the work. Sales of phosphorized pollard manufactured at the Department's poison-depots continue to increase, and the question of increasing and improving the plants at these depots will have to be considered if the Department elects to continue the manufacture for sale.

NOXIOUS-WEEDS CONTROL.

This matter is still the bugbear of the Department and those officers who have to administer the Act relating to it. Some weeds are always a debatable point amongst farmers and others, particularly Californian thistle. Some hold that the latter does no harm, others affirm that it is most dangerous and that every step should be taken to eradicate it. An interview took place lately at Balclutha between delegates representing settlers in the Owaka and Balclutha districts and the Secretary of Agriculture and some officers of the Department who have to deal with the administration of the Act. After a long discussion it was agreed that the Act should be held in abeyance in those districts for a season, providing the settlers promised to "do their best" to keep the Californian thistle in check. This promise, it is reported, has not been carried out, little if any effort having been made. If what was done was "their best," then it was a very poor effort, and clearly proves the necessity for, and a vindication of, the Noxious Weeds Act. This measure had to be framed to protect the country as a whole, and also the settlers against themselves. Sweetbrier, gorse, and broom continue to be slowly cleared, but much remains to be done in this direction.

As country becomes opened up by settlement, weeds advance. This is very noticeable in the King-country and lands on the west coast of the North Island. After a bush-burn plants such as ink-weed overrun the country at once; and getting these growths under is a serious tax financially on those who may be battling hard to make a success of their holdings.

The same applies to blackberry and the clearing of lands on the west coast of the South Island. In the latter case it is hardly reasonable to expect that blackberry can be efficiently controlled in the present state of population and settlement, so great a hold has the plant taken of the country; and as seeds have been carried by birds and other agencies, the native bush is infested with seeds waiting till the bush is cleared and the sun and air admitted to germinate and become an everlasting source of worry and work. River-beds and Crown and Native lands continue to be a source of vexation and annoyance to those adjoining, and owing to the extent of these lands and the overgrown state of the weeds on them they are difficult obstacles to overcome from every point of view.

On account of the alleged shortage of farm labour caused by the war less attention has been paid to the clearing of weeds than could be wished for, and Inspectors have generally refrained on that account also from stringently enforcing the provisions of the Act. Still there are districts so comparatively free from weeds that it would be wrong and unwise not to try and protect them and keep them free, if possible, by the application of the powers under the Act. While credit is due to some landowners for doing fair work for the suppression of weeds, without pressure, others simply do nothing except when forced.

GRAIN AND PRODUCE GRADING.

Following is the report of the Chief Grain Grader, Mr. A. W. Smith (headquarters at Dunedin):—

Shortly after my appointment to the position of Chief Grain Grader I had to temporarily relinquish the duties of this office in order to take up the work of inspection of wheat transactions under the regulations of 5th February, 1917, on behalf of the Board of Trade, and also to attend to the distribution of cargoes of Australian wheat as they arrived from time to time. Nevertheless I found time to do a good deal of preliminary work in connection with grain-grading, preparatory to inaugurating a more organized system which will tend towards making the certificate of quality issued by the Government grain graders of a greater value in commercial transactions in grain and produce than appears to have been the case hitherto. After inspection of the grading as at present carried out at the various ports I drew up a report on the whole subject, pointing out therein what I considered to be the defects of the present system, and at the same time advancing suggestions which would make for improvement, which I trust to see put into operation during the coming year.

Since sending in my report on the grading the North Island and South Island branches of the New Zealand Grain-merchants' Association have met in conference and formulated terms and conditions which will govern and be implied in all contracts for sale of New Zealand grain, seed, and produce: and the section of these conditions referring to grading is clause 7 (a), which reads, "When sales of grain and produce are made on grade, certificate of Government grader who is appointed by North Island Association and is approved by South Island Association at port of shipment final; buyers to pay grader's fees." The effect of this clause will be to make the grader's certificate absolutely final as to quality, and from which there can be no appeal; and, further, the fact that the grader will receive his fees from the buyer, and will naturally look to him for instruction when to sample, will save a lot of trouble that has arisen in the past through the buyer afterwards rejecting the goods on the plea that he was not notified that the goods purchased were about to be shipped, and so was not allowed an opportunity to inspect the quality prior to shipment. Altogether the new proposal should result in a greater use being made of graders' services than under the system where fees were paid by sellers, as the latter more often than not shipped produce without getting a certificate of quality. The rate of remuneration, 6d. per ten sacks, should also pay the grader better than the old rates at which he worked.

In an interview which I had with Messrs. Lewisham (president) and Young (secretary) of the North Island Grain-merchants' Association the above clause was fully discussed. The suggestion made in my report on grading that this Department fix the various grades to which the several graders should work meets with their full support and approval. The bulk of the produce shipped from the South Island goes to the North Island now that Australia is practically a closed market to us, and in the past the North Island merchants have been very often the losers through the grades being fixed by the southern grain associations, many of whose members have made forward sales before harvest, and subsequently fixed the grades in a manner that allowed them to fill their contracts to the best financial advantage.

During the year Mr. J. A. Tipping, Government grader at Dunedin, surrendered his license owing to there being so little grading done at Dunedin, and pending the appointment of another grader I have carried out the duties