

becoming scarce, appreciably diminishing the dairy returns in some districts. Crops were harvested under good climatic conditions, and very remunerative prices were obtained. The average prices for stock were as follows: Lambs, from 12s. 6d., 15s., 18s., up to 25s. for prime; ewes, average for good quality, 30s.; weaner cattle, £3 to £5 per head; store cattle, £6 to £14, according to quality; dairy heifers, £10; dairy cows, £12 to £15; fat cattle, £16 to £20.

Some bridle-tracks only formed are still to be found in bush districts, and these are in places out of repair, but otherwise roads are in good order.

A destructive storm swept over the Island in March, and in the bush districts around Raetihi, Horopito, and Ohakune extensive fires broke out, causing great damage to property, stock, grass, and, I regret to say, to life as well—a settler and his wife and child perishing in the flames. Several sawmills were destroyed, a large number of dwellings were demolished, and thousands of acres were so swept by the fires as to require resowing. Substantial assistance was rendered to the settlers by the Government and private individuals, which will materially help in regassing, rebuilding, and stocking farms affected by the disaster. The fires also swept the districts of Upper Waitotara, Waipakura, Momohaki, Tauakira, Upper Wangachū, Field's Track, and thereabouts, seven dwellings being destroyed. Although the immediate loss to the settlers in stock, fencing, and other improvements is severe, it is now generally admitted that in most instances the fire has had a beneficial effect in cleaning up a large area of land which would otherwise have involved a considerable expenditure of money and time to arrive at the same results.

It is estimated that 170 Crown tenants are serving with the Expeditionary Forces. The area notified open for application was 4,739 acres, of which 2,799 acres was for settlement by discharged soldiers. In addition an area of 23,048 acres was dealt with under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The area remaining open for application at the close of the year was 958 acres for ordinary selection and 25,755 acres for discharged soldiers.

The Land Board held twelve ordinary meetings and gave consent to 246 transfers. It held one special meeting, and made visits of inspection to the various soldier settlements in the land district.

In the North Waimarino Improved-farm Settlement there now remain ten settlers who have not yet taken up licenses under the Land Act, 1908.

Although the number of tenants in arrear with rents is forty-three less than last year, the amount owing is £1,644 more, of which £1,534 is payable by two tenants who have been serving with the Expeditionary Forces. Arrangements are now being made for payment of this amount, and action is being taken to still further reduce the total amount overdue.

The education reserve endowments are found upon inspection to be worked satisfactorily. Leases numbering seventeen expired during the year, and the lessees were granted renewals, the aggregate rental being increased from £101 to £437 per annum.

NELSON.

(F. A. THOMPSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Progress generally in this district during the year has not been very marked, owing mainly to lack of labour on account of so many tenants and farm labourers having joined the Expeditionary Forces. As bushfellers were very scarce the work of developing new areas, grassing, fencing, &c., has necessarily been restricted.

In the older established parts of the district, however, in respect to both leasehold and freehold lands, better progress has been made, and a successful year has been experienced owing to the high prices ruling for stock, &c. Dairying continues to advance, and the output this year shows an increase over last year's figures, while in Westport district alone two hundred cows have been added to the dairy herds.

The timber industry for the year shows a decline, as owing to shortage of labour many of the plants are only half-manned. The drop in the output is not, however, wholly due to shortage of labour, but is accounted for to a great extent by the fact that the timber areas are becoming more remote and difficult of access.

The fruit industry has not been so successful as in former years as, although large quantities of fruit were produced, growers were unable to obtain space for export. The unfavourable season and the prevalence of brown-rot caused serious loss to growers of stone-fruits.

The reserving of areas of land for selection by discharged soldiers has restricted the land available for general selectors, but on the whole the latter have had their wants supplied from lands already on the market.

In the early part of the year destructive bush-fires occurred in the Maruia district, and many settlers had their pastures destroyed. The matter was brought under the notice of the Government, and advances were made to the settlers affected up to half the cost of regassing.

During the year the Land Board held twelve ordinary meetings at the principal Land Office, and also paid a visit to the West Coast districts, holding special meetings at Westport and Reefton. Mr. Baigent's term of office expired in March, and he was reappointed for a further term. The term of office of Mr. Patterson, the Crown tenants' representative, also expired, and an election was held in December, when Mr. Patterson was again returned by a substantial majority.

The reports from the Rangers show that, in spite of difficulties in obtaining labour, &c., the settlers have, generally speaking, improved their holdings far in advance of requirements, the excess of improvements being £179,034 over requirements, while the number of defaulters in respect to residence and improvements is not considerable.