

TARANAKI.

(G. H. BULLARD, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past year opened rather badly, as feed did not come on well at the start; but the late summer and autumn in general were very good, although unusually wet, and the milk returns recovered and kept up very well till late in the season. The position in early spring was not so good in the northern part of the district for sheep-farming, as the weather was so rough during the lambing season that the losses were heavy among newly born lambs and old ewes, and percentages were not quite as good as usual.

In the southern end of the district sheep and stock of all kinds have done very well. Fleeces have been rather lighter than usual. Late in the season fat stock was difficult to quit owing to the congestion in the meat-works through shortage of shipping. This has been rather against the farmers who have paid very high prices for land.

Settlers occupying bush lands have been handicapped by the very wet season preventing good burns, and many burns may have to be left till next season. The turnip crops in the northern part of the district have been very good, and a much larger area than usual was sown. In the southern end the turnip crops have not been very successful.

Notwithstanding the high cost of material and labour it is gratifying to note that about 9,500 acres of bush have been felled by Crown settlers in the northern end of the district. The collection of cream from farms in the backblocks by different companies is becoming very useful to holders of small sheep-farms with a little flat or easy land fit to run a few cows, by giving them a little money for current expenses to tide over the longer intervals between returns from ordinary grazing.

Owing to shortage of labour it has been difficult to keep noxious weeds in check; but as farmers gain experience they are evolving better methods of keeping blackberry down.

High prices still continue to obtain for dairy-products, but the price of land seems to have soared even higher than these returns warrant. The high prices and spirit of land gambling have largely increased the number of land agents, already too numerous (in some cases returned soldiers and retired farmers have taken up this occupation), and their fees and the necessary stamp duties must represent a very large tax on the farming community, owing to the frequency with which farms change hands. This also has the effect of taking energetic men from the ranks of producers, who swell the population in the towns, and thus increase the housing problem.

The price of dairy cows with a Jersey strain was for some little time influenced by demand from outside districts. Nearly all the rural lands opened have been kept for selection by returned soldiers.

The increased work caused by the rush of soldier applications under section 2 placed a very great strain on the office staff, and it was only by some of the clerical staff (to whom my thanks are due) working overtime that demands were met, and even then some of the ordinary work had to fall into arrears. It has also made it very difficult for us to meet promptly demands for returns, &c.

The ruling prices for stock during the year have been—Bullocks (fat), £14 to £16 10s.; cows (fat), £10 to £12; bullocks (four years old), £10 to £12; bullocks (three years old), £8 to £9; steers (eighteen months), £5 to £6; dairy cows, £12 to £22; ordinary cows, £8 to £12; dairy heifers, £10 to £17; wethers (prime), £1 8s. to £1 14s.; wethers (medium), £1 to £1 8s.; ewes (prime shorn), £1 6s. to £1 9s.; breeding-ewes (four and six tooth), £1 3s. to £1 12s.

Fat stock seems to have been higher in the northern than in the southern end of the district, and dairy stock lower in value.

During the early part of the year, owing to shortage of Rangers, inspections fell a little into arrear.

About thirty allotments of rural Crown land in the southern end of the district will be placed on the market in the next few months, and a similar number in the northern end, beside the subdivisions of estates purchased under the Lands for Settlement Act. A number of bush sections were placed on the market, but only a few applications were received, and the returned soldier is not showing any very keen desire to take up unimproved land, although some offered was handy to railway communication.

WELLINGTON.

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

Last autumn and winter were probably the worst experienced for many years, and a late spring followed which retarded dairying operations, but subsequently the weather was all that could be desired, and there has been ample feed over practically the whole of the district, with the exception of parts of the Wairarapa, where the rainfall was not sufficient.

In settlements such as Greystoke and Fairfield, where a good deal of cultivation is carried out, there have been good returns of oats, potatoes, and turnips.

Good progress has been made during the year with the construction of the horse-tracks in the soldier settlements in the Whirinaki and Retaruke districts, and now practically every section has feasible access.

As in the previous year, practically the whole of the transactions have been in lands set apart for discharged soldiers, the area dealt with being 39,574 acres. The area remaining and to be dealt with during the coming year is 16,083 acres for selection by discharged soldiers, and 186 acres for ordinary selection.

The leases of thirty education endowments were renewed, the area affected being 7,239 acres, and the increase in rental being £2,259 15s. 6d.