

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Wellington, 15th September, 1921.

I BEG to submit the following report on the work of the Department during the year ended 31st March, 1921, together with the detailed reports furnished by the various branches and forming the appendix hereto :—

During the period under review the various activities of the Department were maintained at full pressure—in fact, its resources have been strained to meet the calls for extended services in various directions. In these circumstances, some corresponding expansion in the professional or expert and also the related office staffs has been unavoidable.

The agricultural instruction service initiated as part of the scheme of reorganization of the Department two or three years ago has continued to make progress, and its value is being more fully realized. With agricultural instruction for pupils attending primary and secondary schools, and for students of colleges of university rank, the Department of Agriculture is not directly concerned, this naturally coming into the sphere of the Education Department; but to all who have completed their ordinary education, and are either proposing to make farming their livelihood or are already engaged on that enterprise, this Department must of necessity become the training and instructional centre. In a conference held during the year between this Department and the Education Department it was agreed that the practical training of pupils after they had left school, and extension instruction to farmers, were properly the functions of the Agriculture Department. The training of young men to become proficient farmers can perhaps be best carried out by means of the establishment of farm-schools where the practices of modern farming may be taught. Such institutions are clearly of great importance, and it is hoped to make the present experimental farms function as permanent farm-schools so soon as it is practical to do so. This would prove of great benefit towards the development of New Zealand agriculture, but, in addition, many of the farmers of the country are showing a strong desire for instruction and technical advice on agricultural matters. In other words, the necessity and demand for agricultural extension work is widespread and insistent. It is not unusual to hear statements to the effect that the great development of agricultural extension by means of skilled agricultural instructors or advisers which is occurring in Europe and America indicates that New Zealand is lagging behind in this respect. The comparison is, however, rather unfair, because, although our actual agricultural instruction service may be weak numerically, instruction and extension are by no means confined to that special branch. One has only to consider the extensive instructional activities of the Live-stock, Dairy, and Horticulture Divisions, and that of the Chemistry and Biology Sections, to realize that the Department is fully seized of the importance of such work.

Doubtless, however, the great weakness in our extension activities hitherto has been the fact that specialization in instruction in some particular phase—such as, for instance, control of animal-disease, herd-testing, dairy technique, fruitgrowing, and the like—has outstripped instruction in perhaps the more fundamental activities of farming—namely, crop-production, crop-utilization, and farm-management generally. It is in order to remedy this deficiency in the instructional work of the Department that I feel the necessity for further strengthening the agricultural instruction service, which has remained under my direct supervision with the valued assistance of Mr. A. H. Cockayne and Mr. B. C. Aston.

Development of agricultural instruction work through capable and efficient instructors, combining sound practical farming knowledge with good knowledge of scientific agriculture, must prove of greater practical value to primary producers than the operations of experimental farms. During the year three Instructors have been appointed to the staff, this representing an increase of one, as there was one resignation and one retirement. It is to be hoped that the staff will be considerably further strengthened in the near future, for at present the districts allocated to the respective Instructors are far too large for them to be able to cope adequately with the many demands that are made on their services. Further remarks on the work of this service are made at the head of the report of the Agricultural Instruction and Experimental Farms Branch, forming part of the appendix.

The Department has continued to co-operate in controlling the working of a number of farms constituting or forming part of institutions administered by other public Departments. The Avonhead Training-farm of the Repatriation Department has been controlled by the Director of the Live-stock Division, Mr. A. R. Young. The Superintendent of Experimental Farms, Mr. J. L. Bruce, in addition to supervising this Department's three main experimental farms, has acted in an active advisory capacity to the Queen Mary Hospital farm (Hanmer Springs) and the Burnham Military Depot farm (Defence Department), the Pukeora Sanatorium farm and Otaki Sanatorium farm (Health Department), and the Tauherenikau Training-farm and Moa Seed-farm (Repatriation Department). He has also controlled the Smedley Estate, in Hawke's Bay, on behalf of the Public Trust Office.

The Live-stock Division, with its extended scope, has worked efficiently. In connection with the health of live-stock in the Dominion—which remains on a high comparative level as regards freedom from serious disease—it is satisfactory to note that the records of the Veterinary Laboratory indicate a diminution in the occurrence of contagious mammitis. Condemnations of stock for tubercular affection at abattoirs, meat-works, &c., also show a reduction, especially in the case of cows.