

Exploration surveys are also proceeding in similar country farther south towards Ongarue and Taumarunui, where there is a considerable area of grazing-country to become available for settlement. In the Maramarua district, between the lower Waikato and the Hauraki Gulf, surveys have been completed of a considerable area of hill country, which is, however, mostly of poor quality, and will require much time, labour, and expenditure for its development. In the hill country between Tauranga and Waihi surveys are being carried on, and there are areas in the upper valleys of the Rangitaiki and Tarawera Rivers of the Bay of Plenty district which have been surveyed and will be available for opening within a few months. The reopening for general selection of a considerable area hitherto available only for discharged soldiers, to which reference has already been made, will do something to meet the demand from other land-seekers.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—The hopes for a more favourable season than that of 1919-20 have unfortunately not been fulfilled, and the third year of a succession of dry autumns has had a very depressing effect on farming conditions of the district. Stock generally declined in price from March of 1920 until the rains came in June and July, when there was a very marked increase in values in anticipation of plenty of feed and a continuation of the good markets which had previously existed. These expectations were not realized, and the combined influence of the financial stringency, dry summer, abnormal shortage of water, and every prospect of an unfavourable autumn resulted in a most alarming drop in the price of any stock offered for sale in January. It is, however, quite possible that the slump was more aggravated by the extreme shortness of feed than by the actual financial crisis, and a steady increase may reasonably be expected as soon as the winter carrying-capacity is correctly gauged. One thing is quite certain: that directly the real Hawke's Bay season makes its reappearance the demand for sheep and for cattle especially should materially assist towards effecting a solid improvement in the pastoral industry.

Throughout the district generally grain crops were exceedingly good, and a much larger area than usual was harvested, but last year's costs of putting the seed in against this year's prices for the produce left very little margin in favour of the grower, and small farmers have felt the pinch very acutely.

Dairying has been, on the whole, fairly successful, although many men have complained of a shrinkage in their returns, attributing this to the scarcity of feed in the summer. This trouble will be a recurring one so long as grass pastures form the principal feature of a dairy farm.

Orchardists have done very well, and a great deal of enthusiasm exists amongst the growers who are working to develop the industry, and who are taking all precautions to keep blights as far away as possible.

Bee-culture does not seemingly loom very large, and cannot be termed a staple industry. So much of the successful production of honey depends upon an abundance of good clovers, and so much of the latter is dependent upon suitable seasons, that a careful study of the most interesting work is absolutely necessary before suitable sites for apiaries should be selected. Especially is this so in a district like Hawke's Bay, where flowering hedges are scarce, and where rye-grass and cocksfoot are such dominating factors in its productivity.

Although the past year ended with a general feeling of depression, it does not appear that there is any sudden decline in land-values. There are, of course, instances of inflated prices which must come down, but few sales are taking place, and well-held, well-farmed lands are not likely to deteriorate in value. After all, good producing lands are the best asset the Dominion has to set against the present load of liabilities and debts. Little distinction can be drawn between the present conditions of Crown tenants and the rest of the farming community. Each is similarly affected by seasons and prices, but the former has the advantage of possessing a considerate landlord, and, except in cases where high goodwills have been paid, the Crown tenant is in a satisfactory position.

Lands opened for Selection.—The total area made available during the year for soldier settlement amounted to 65,285 acres, including ten land-for-settlement blocks; the George Hunter gift block (2,785 acres); also two blocks, Parinui and Rissington Settlements (4,844 acres), settled under the provisions of section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917; besides various miscellaneous areas amounting to 11,144 acres. The whole of these lands, representing 143 separate holdings, were selected with the exception of two sections, showing the keen demand still existing for Hawke's Bay lands. In connection with the settlement of this large area the Land Board dealt with 1,347 applications received from all parts of the Dominion. The unselected lands comprised 10,470 acres of difficult country, and it is proposed to now open them for general selection with preference conditions.

The most important blocks made available for grazing were the Ohuka Settlement (16,617 acres) and Ardkeen Settlement (11,296 acres), respectively about twenty-two miles and twelve miles from Wairoa; the George Hunter gift block (2,785 acres), about one mile from Porangahau; the Crownthorpe Settlement (8,805 acres), about sixteen miles from Hastings. The following settlements suited for dairying pursuits and general farming were also opened: Repongaere (2,302 acres), about twelve miles from Gisborne; Omana (917 acres), about twenty miles from Wairoa; Homebush (268 acres), about five miles from Gisborne; Paremata Settlement (998 acres), about three miles from Tolaga Bay; and Glengarry Settlement (1,950 acres), about two miles from Dannevirke.