

The cases of the single farm holders are generally of more difficulty, as these properties are in most instances capitalized on a higher basis than in the case of settlement subdivisions. This was, however, inevitable, since properties of this nature were usually picked ones, chosen by the soldier himself, who was, moreover, often quite willing to pay—out of money borrowed from the State—more for the property than the Department's valuations justified, and who sometimes went behind the back of the Land Board, and secretly arranged to pay over to the vendor a sum of money in excess of that at which the property was ostensibly being bought. Apart from cases of this kind, a large majority of these single farm purchases are on a sound basis, and though their position temporarily may be one of difficulty, there is no reason to doubt a large measure of ultimate success.

*Realization and Redisposal of Vacated Properties.*

With the limited demand that has been in evidence for some time the question of redisposal of vacated properties has been one of some difficulty. In this district, too, the question is one of pressing urgency, owing to the rapid deterioration of properties that are unoccupied or unstocked. The ordinary method of sale through the Supreme Court has been conspicuous by its lack of results—except of lengthy procedure and unnecessary expense. Considering that the State, as mortgagee, is usually interested in a very much larger degree than the private mortgagee, having greatly exceeded the usual margin of security, there is urgent need for statutory power to dispose of such properties with a minimum of delay, for little can be gained by holding on to properties, since any prospects of an enhanced price would be fully discounted by depreciation during the period of delay. In these cases the only wise policy is to face the loss at once, and dispose of the property to the best advantage at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to have the land brought back into production without delay.

TARANAKI.

(H. J. LOWE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past year has been better than its predecessor for returned soldiers settled on the land, but the previous year's returns from the point of view of a dairying and grazing district were so discouraging that the great majority of settlers have still considerable leeway to make up, and the slump in value of stock originally supplied has made it extremely difficult for them to keep their farms adequately stocked. As a consequence applications for postponements of payments owing have been numerous, and sympathetic treatment has invariably been given where the reports have shown relief was necessary and the settler was the victim of adverse circumstances. The method adopted of taking milk orders on the dairying companies has enabled the Department to keep many accounts within reasonable limits, and I have to thank the dairy companies for so whole-heartedly supporting me in this matter. Numbers of farms, I fear, came on the market in the boom period because vendors knew pasture was running out and had not the means to renew it. The soldier (when up to his limit of loan) tried to spend what he could from his milk cheque, but when we took half that source dried up, and arrears have therefore been kept down at the expense of the renewal of the pasture, which cannot satisfactorily continue. During the later part of the financial year an Inquiry Board has been traversing the district obtaining particulars of properties acquired, for the purpose of furnishing a report to the Hon. the Minister of Lands regarding conditions of soldier settlements generally, and, in the event of failure, the cause of such failure, and whether relief should be granted; and, if so, in what manner. Unfortunately, wet weather and consequent muddy roads retarded the Board in their work.

To the perils of worn-out pastures the undue prevalence of noxious weeds has this past year to be added, and this phase of farming is causing grave concern, not only to those who are faced with a heavy cash expenditure to combat such weeds, but also to adjoining farmers holding clean farms, who fear their holding becoming similarly affected.

*Soldier Settlements.*

These generally are feeling the effects of the slump, and there is no doubt that overhead expenses that do not increase production are detrimental to the progress of a settler. The varying moods of the market in the past few years have unsettled many settlers. Land well adapted for sheep-farming was utilized for dairying to bolster things up when the former industry badly slumped. Had the settlers kept to sheep the position now would have been good; undoubtedly, attempting dairying on purely grazing-country must be discontinued, and many of these farms must return to sheep-farming. The following figures set the position out more in detail:—

The total receipts during the year for credit of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account were £163,700 8s. 6d., the main items being made up of—Repayment on farms, £32,237 16s. 4d.; on houses, £28,777 18s. 8d.; on current account, £89,000 3s. 1d.

The advances paid out amounted to £114,000, the principal items being—Farms, £5,293 7s. 11d.; houses, £17,535 3s.; current account, £85,564 5s. 9d. The total advances outstanding on the 31st March were—On farms, £929,413 13s. 5d.; on houses, £370,222 4s. 5d.; on current account, £346,936 9s. 10d. The total advances made since the inception of the soldier-settlement scheme in this district total £2,038,663 14s. 5d.

WELLINGTON.

(THOMAS BROOK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Soldier settlers engaged in sheep-farming have benefited greatly by the recovery in values of wool and stock, and another good year should place many of them in a sound position. Dairy-farmers have not improved their position to the same extent, but they, too, should show an improvement on last year.