

Rent and interest payments are slightly better, but the improvement is not more than was expected. Among our soldier lessees and mortgagees there are many from whom it is impossible to get anything except under compulsion: they recognize no liability to the Crown until all other claimants and their own wants are satisfied.

The Inquiry Board appointed to investigate and report on soldier settlement is making good progress with its inspections. The settlers are anxiously awaiting the result of the Board's report.

One property of 759 acres was acquired for two applicants under section 3 of the 1917 Act, designated the Tapuae Settlement, and was stocked with sheep towards the close of the year. The only other new land dealt with comprised twelve allotments, of 404 acres, of which three were taken up as additional land. There were thirteen sections which had been surrendered and reallocated, of an area of 1,835 acres, making a total of twenty-seven selections, comprising 2,998 acres.

The forfeitures and surrenders amounted to twenty-three holdings, an area of 4,621 acres; and there are now twenty-one holdings vacant, a total area of 6,960 acres. The interests of fifty-eight farm mortgagors, involving an area of 7,944 acres and comprising all classes of security, were determined by legal process, and these areas will be dealt with as soon as practicable. The interests of ten dwelling mortgagors were determined by legal process, and of twenty dwellings that came into the Department's hands nine have been disposed of, leaving eleven for which no buyers have yet been obtained, though practically all are tenanted.

Advances were made to enable twenty-three persons to acquire farm lands of an aggregate area of 4,639 acres, and 118 received assistance to erect or purchase dwellings.

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. COOK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The position of the soldiers' settlements in Marlborough for the year ending 31st March, 1923, shows, on paper, only a slight improvement, although, practically speaking, the improvement is substantial: that is, there are many settlers whose prospects do not look bright when judged by the state of their accounts, though their progress on the land is sound, and with improving general conditions they will pull through. This year has seen the weeding-out of the unfit and those totally incapable of making a success of the land. I feel sure that practically all the men who enter the coming year in possession of their sections will eventually become established and prove to be producers, and therefore a good asset to the country.

NELSON.

(H. D. McKELLAR, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The soldier settlers on pastoral and dairying lands have experienced a fairly satisfactory year, but have not recovered from the effects of the financial depression. Prices for wool and stock have increased considerably, while payments for butterfat have been maintained by dairy factories at a figure which leaves a good margin over expenses. Those soldiers who have taken up fruitgrowing for a living have not been so fortunate. Although there is abundance of good, clean fruit, there appears to be great difficulty in obtaining a price that will even pay the grower for the ordinary upkeep of his orchard.

A number of properties have been abandoned or realized upon owing to the fact that the holders thereof were unable to achieve success. Steps are now being taken to place these properties in the market at prices that will attract purchasers.

Towards the end of 1922 a Board was set up to inquire into the position generally with regard to soldier settlement. This Board has almost completed its investigations in this district, and its report is expected shortly.

WESTLAND.

(W. T. MORPETH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Only one soldier has been financed during the past year, the advance being under section 2.

Whilst many of the soldier settlers have contrived to hold their own and pay their way under generally adverse conditions, a considerable number have fallen into arrears with their instalment payments. In one or two cases inexperience, neglect, and extravagance have been contributory causes to their present financial condition, but, generally speaking, the soldier settlers, realize their responsibilities and face their difficulties in the right spirit. With the exception above noted, all advances have been for the purchase of stock, improvements, &c. The various holdings are widely scattered, some settlers concentrating on dairying, some on grazing, while a few combine both. A feature of the district is the variety of the tenures under which many of the individual holdings are held. There are 164 soldiers in the Miscellaneous Ledgers, of whom 104 are on rural holdings, and fifty-eight have received advances for the purchase or erection of dwellings.

Although it is satisfactory to report that the percentage of failures in the district will probably be very low, it will yet be necessary in many cases to make substantial concessions to enable deserving soldier settlers who are in arrears with their payments to recover themselves and stabilize their financial position.

CANTERBURY.

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

Throughout the district there are sixty-four soldier settlements, comprising 284,833 acres, divided into 357 holdings. Of these three holdings are at present unoccupied, comprising an area of 915 acres; some of these are small holdings. There are 644 farms held under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1917.