

The number of "wasters" now on soldiers' farms is small, and they will soon be replaced by genuine farmers. One pleasing feature is the number of men who are "making good" at dairy-farming who have had little or no previous experience; our inspection proves that the small dairy farm composed of land of good quality is the best proposition for the soldier settler. The placing of soldiers on bush land (unimproved) is a mistake, and their prospects of success are not good. Bush land is difficult to farm, and returns are small for some years.

We have been surprised at the high cost of roading some of the settlements (Croydon, for example), and this loaded on the sections, coupled with the high cost of buildings and fencing, caused land bought at a very reasonable price to be very dear land for the soldiers.

There are some instances of men who have spent too much money in buildings and non-revenue-producing improvements, but these cases are few in number. It is a mistake to advance more than two-thirds of the value of improvements that are the result of the labour of the tenant; he is apt to become a wages-man to the Department, and fails to take a proprietary interest in his farm, as he has little risk in the success or failure of the venture.

The system of confining advances to £2,500 on land and £750 on stock, although apparently sound, may create hardship. If in special cases an increase could be granted it would in many cases place a man in a good position years earlier than would be the case under the present limit, and in some cases save him from leaving his farm. We have in mind cases of farms the pastures on which had been allowed to run out for want of top-dressing. The occupiers were up to their limit, and although the application of manure would have doubled their returns they were unable to purchase any through having exhausted their working-limit through purchase of stock, erection of house and fencing. It is our opinion, after traversing the whole of the Taranaki Land District, that the productiveness of the majority of the land depends entirely on liberal application of manures. The application of manures on soldier sections will improve the Government security in the property, besides ensuring the repayment of the soldiers' debt through the increased production from the lands.

We have also met cases where soldiers have been put on bush sections with from 100 to 200 acres in grass and 300 to 400 acres in bush. They required sufficient extra finance to fell 100 acres more to put the farm on a paying basis, but being up to their limit this was impossible. A little elasticity in regard to finance would make these men successful farmers.

The way the Lands Department has administered this great scheme in the face of the most difficult times experienced by men in business for many years is a credit to the officers of the Department. We find that they have treated all cases sympathetically, and that in spite of their trials the majority of soldier settlers realize this fully.

WELLINGTON LAND DISTRICT.

Summary.

In the majority of cases settlers are of good average type, who are making the best of their circumstances. Prospects in some cases not bright—accommodation on some farms indifferent. Majority of settlers in arrear, due principally to the slump, and in some cases too high price of land. There are those who would be failures under any conditions, but these are proportionately small in number.

Land purchased during boom periods is too dear in relation to producing-capacity.

In selecting land too little consideration has been given to expenditure necessary for improvements and development. These lands may be classed as follows:—

(a.) Wet and swampy land. Settlers on this class of land at a disadvantage in having to pay rentals for portions of sections not revenue-producing.

(b.) Worn-out pasture. Stumping and ploughing necessary before pasture can be renewed. This is costly work, and can only be carried out when the bush has been down a considerable time. In northern part of district stumps have not started to decay, and pastures can only be temporarily improved by top-dressing, and this is also costly.

(c.) Scrub and gorse country. This class of country entails considerable recurring expenditure.

(d.) Buildings and fences. All improvements were effected at a very high cost, and this, when added to the high cost of the land, makes it difficult to successfully carry on.

The slump is largely responsible for so many settlers being in arrear. Stock were bought at high prices and sold on slump markets, and there was the drop in wool and store stock. The fall in the price of butterfat seriously affected the position of the dairy-farmer, and in a number of cases dairy stock were bought at high prices. Attention drawn to the necessity of building up good herds of cows. Some settlers attempting to dairy on unsuitable lands, such lands being too poor for dairying and not large enough for sheep. Certain holdings are subject to timber-cutting rights, and it is desirable timber should be milled as soon as possible so as to give settlers full use of land. In certain cases lands should be made subject to the bush and swamp provisions of the Act.

Money allowed for stock and improvements not sufficient: present limit does not allow bush sections to be brought into profitable occupation and stocked. Cases where lands understocked and others with no stock. Lands go back if not stocked. Consider finance for stock should not be limited. A more flexible system in dealing with stock considered advisable. Settlers to have detailed statements of accounts. Draws attention to inconsistency in valuations. Approximately 7 per cent. of settlers visited are straight-out failures.

Consider settlers as a whole have been generously treated by the Department.