

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

A PERUSAL of the detailed reports submitted by the various Commissioners of Crown Lands in Appendix I will serve to show that the past year has been one of steady progress on the part of the farming community generally, and that satisfactory returns have on the whole been obtained from all classes of farming. The winter was a favourable one throughout most of the Dominion, and there was ample feed, with the result that stock came through the winter well, and lambing percentages were very fair.

In last year's report reference was made to the remarkable success of the wool-sales in the 1923-24 season. The year just past must also be specially mentioned as a wool year, though it is extremely difficult to judge whether the remarkably high prices obtained at the opening sales have proved as beneficial to the pastoral industry as at first seemed to be the case. At the first sale of the season, held in Wellington on the 17th November, competition was exceptionally keen, the American buyers being free bidders and being forced to high rates by strong Bradford, Continental, and local opposition. The price standards set at that sale were maintained and even exceeded at one or two of the subsequent sales in other centres; but the market then showed a steadier tendency, and prices, though still satisfactory, eased a good deal. There is little doubt, however, that, all things considered, the 1924-25 wool season, combined with good prices for wool and mutton, will put the pastoral industry on a sounder footing than it has enjoyed for some years past, and that the results, provided always that land-values are not unduly inflated, will be reflected in increased prosperity all round.

The dairying industry continues to expand, and lower prices have been balanced by an increased output. Many problems face the dairy-farmer; but with a gradual improvement in the quality of the herds and the stamping-out of diseases, combined with improved methods of feeding, and a steadily growing appreciation of the great value of top-dressing, there is little doubt that this expansion must continue, to the great benefit of the whole Dominion.

Agriculturally the season was a very fair one, and grain-growers should have had a reasonably profitable year. Rust was very prevalent in Canterbury; but in Southland the harvest season was exceptionally favourable, the grain threshing out in good condition.

The early winter was marked by an excessive rainfall in many parts. Floods occurred in portions of the North Auckland District, and more severely on the Hauraki Plains, where considerable damage was sustained. The land flooded, however, was but a small proportion of the reclaimed area on the plains. Again in December there were extensive floods in many parts, resulting in considerable damage to roads and bridges. The Wairarapa was the principal sufferer, many miles of fencing being levelled and roads badly scoured.

Rents in arrear show a considerable improvement on the position shown in last year's report. This subject is more fully dealt with under its appropriate heading later on in this report.

Crown tenants now on the books of the Department number 35,842, occupying an area of over 20,000,000 acres. Over 9,750,000 acres of this total is represented by pastoral runs, the great majority of which are held in the Marlborough, Westland, Canterbury, Otago, and Southland Districts.

A special feature of the closing quarter of the year was the purchase by the Government of over 400 acres of land on the eastern side of the Hutt Valley. A branch suburban railway-line is being constructed, and the land will be subdivided on the best town-planning lines. For this purpose the Lower Hutt Borough Council is co-operating with the Government in a town-planning competition for the best lay-out of the areas purchased, together with certain adjacent portions of the Hutt Borough, and no pains will be spared to bring the scheme to a successful conclusion.

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the legislation affecting the operations of this Department which was passed during the session of 1924 :—

Land Act, 1924.—For a long time past the necessity for a consolidation of the land laws has been keenly felt both by officers of the Department and by the general public. The consolidation has been effected in so far as the law with respect to ordinary Crown lands is concerned by the passing of the Land Act, 1924, which is a compilation, with certain amendments, of the Land Act, 1908, and the greater part of ten Acts amending the same. It is hoped that a Bill consolidating the law with respect to the acquisition and disposal of private lands for settlement purposes will be introduced during next session.

Education Reserves Amendment Act, 1924.—This Act comprises a number of amendments to the Education Reserves Act, 1908, found necessary for the purpose of administering more effectively the lands set apart as endowments for primary and secondary education.

Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1924.—This Act, which contains 196 sections and three schedules, establishes a record in the number of special enactments contained in one Act, promoted by Departments of State, local authorities, &c.

Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1924.—The purport of this Act is principally to authorize the Dominion Revaluation Board to revalue and to reduce mortgages in respect to advances