

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

FROM a purely production point of view the past year has been a satisfactory one for Crown settlers and the farming community generally; but it is unfortunate that a decline in the values of primary products should have seriously reduced the Dominion's farming income. Weather conditions have on the whole been satisfactory. The rainfall in the late autumn was generally below normal; but June was a fairly wet month, and there was an ample growth of winter feed in most districts. The winter proved a somewhat cold one, with numerous frosts, and there were heavy snowfalls in the mountain ranges in the South Island, snow-raking having to be resorted to on some of the back-country sheep-stations. The early spring was dry and cold, while November, December, and January were wet and stormy. The abundant rains ensured a prolific growth of grass; but the large number of wet days proved adverse to haymaking in most parts of the country, while shearing was delayed in many localities. Dairy cattle did very well; but lambs did not fatten as well as usual on account of the rankness of the pastures. February and March were very dry months, although conditions were generally favourable to all classes of stock, the effects of the dry spell being mitigated to a considerable extent by the cool temperatures experienced, and by the luxuriant growth occasioned by the heavy rains of previous months. Crops ripened well throughout, and the fine weather greatly facilitated harvesting.

The dairying industry had another most productive year, although prices fell materially, and the total financial returns for the export season will be below last year's. Dairy herds have, however, increased, and farmers generally are using better methods in the management of their stock and pastures, while the greater use of fertilizers is yearly more evident.

The sheep-farmer experienced a somewhat trying year. The slump in wool-values resulted in greatly decreased incomes, and a considerable quantity of wool remained unsold. The demand for the finer wools was especially disappointing. More lambs were slaughtered for export than during the previous year, and although prices were somewhat lower the increased number dealt with maintained the total export value. An increased quantity of mutton was exported. Flocks have increased considerably throughout the Dominion, and this result has been obtained side by side with an increase in dairy and other cattle. Top-dressing is playing a great part in this general increase in flocks and herds.

Grain crops were very fair, and in Otago particularly heavy yields were obtained.

It is fairly apparent that lower prices for primary products than those obtaining of late years may be expected to continue; and to maintain and increase our farming income a greater output, coupled with further improvement in methods and, wherever possible, reduced working-costs, must be looked for. The Dominion possesses the great advantages of a congenial climate and a generally productive soil, and there seems little reason to fear that the call for increased production will not be effectively answered.

The severe earthquakes experienced in June in Nelson and on the West Coast resulted in considerable damage to farming properties in various localities, and it was necessary for the settlers to evacuate some of the valleys, chiefly on account of the access-roads having been destroyed. The services of officers of the Department were fully availed of in the relief measures that were put in hand in the districts affected.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands during the year totalled some 402,900 acres. The tenants on the books of the Department under all tenures numbered at the 31st March 37,061, occupying a total area of over 19,390,000 acres. Over 9,250,000 acres of this total is represented by pastoral runs, while 1,835,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

Over one thousand two hundred sections have been disposed of in the Hutt Valley Settlement, further particulars concerning which will be found in Appendix IV of this report.

LEGISLATION.

The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1929, is divided into four Parts, and deals, firstly, with the promotion of settlement on undeveloped Crown lands; secondly, with the settlement of undeveloped settlement lands; thirdly, with miscellaneous amendments to the Land Act, 1924; and, lastly, with miscellaneous amendments to the Land for Settlements Act, 1925.

The following is a brief summary of the main provisions and objects of the Act:—

A Lands Development Board is constituted, whose functions will be to recommend proposals in connection with the breaking-in and development of Crown and settlement lands, and to deal finally with applications for advances by Crown tenants. There is provision also for the appointment of Advisory Committees to inquire into such matters as may be submitted to them by the Development Board. It is proposed to undertake development work on unoccupied Crown and settlement lands