

Pakihi Lands.—A demonstration area on the main road near Westport is now being developed on the lines of the Cawthron Institute experiments. The necessary funds are provided by this Department, and the work is carried out under the direction of the Fields Supervisor, Department of Agriculture. It is proposed to develop 250 acres in order to determine if the method will prove successful under ordinary farming conditions. It is anticipated that at least three years will be required to give the system a thorough try-out.

MARLBOROUGH.

(P. R. WILKINSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Conditions in Marlborough during the past year have not been up to the average. Copious rains during the latter end of winter continued well into January, when warm dry weather set in, the district now experiencing a drought, from which, however, no ill effect is anticipated. The depression in the values of butter, wool, and sheep, particularly wool and sheep, causes much anxiety, and presents a serious obstacle to many of our sheep-farmers, large and small.

Agriculture.—The farmers under this heading experienced a most difficult season on account of the frequent rains, and much of the lower-lying portions of the Wairau Plain were in a flooded state for an extended period, entailing in the case of many who were advanced in their work the retilling of the land and late sowing. The ordinary harvesting period was an anxious time on account of the wet weather, and the early crops were not up to expectations. The later sowings were more successful, but generally the yield has not been good. Approximately 23,500 acres were down in crops of various kinds, and all are realizing average prices, except red clover or cow-grass, which is almost unsaleable.

Dairying.—The season was not so unfavourable for this class of farming, and all factories report increased production. Final returns and prices for the season cannot, of course, be given at this date, but it is anticipated that last season's quantities will be exceeded. The industry in this district is gradually improving, and settlers are realizing the advantage of culling and selection. Herd-testing is increasing rapidly. Practically nothing was done in this way two years ago, whereas now two groups are operating, and 3,550 cows are under test. Top-dressing and growing supplementary fodder are also receiving more serious consideration. It is probably lack of capital that prevents more rapid extension in these directions, as the need for it is generally fully realized. Valuable experiments are being made by the Agricultural Department in top-dressing, and the farmers have these to guide them in the choice of manures. The dairyman on the bush lands is constantly fighting the fern menace, and it is only hard work, subdivision of paddocks, burning, sowing, and top-dressing that will eventually bring the land up to its full productive value. Calves have been in keen demand, and good prices up to £3 10s. per head have been realized.

Sheep-farming.—The sheep-farmer has had a serious setback on the season's operations. The district produces approximately 8,000,000 lb. of wool, principally from merino and half-bred sheep. The condition of the wool was light, occasioned by the wet spring, and the shearing was prolonged owing to rains. Cheques are about 50 per cent. of last year's, and in some cases well below the 50 per cent. Quite a number of settlers appear to be holding their wool for next season's sales. Except on the high country, which suffered from rough weather, particularly at lambing and shearing times, with consequent heavy losses, the flocks wintered well, and lambing percentage was up to the average. The freezing-works at Picton estimates to put through approximately 120,000 carcasses during the season. Prices opened well at 9½d. and 10d. per pound, but, with falling prices on the London market, have receded to 6½d. per pound for first-grade lamb. Stock on the local markets has fallen in value in sympathy with the wool and export prices, and, where possible, stock is being carried over rather than sold at unremunerative values.

The local ram and ewe fairs were held as usual, but here again values were not maintained. The stud stock is well managed, and breeders, ever on guard to retain their high standard, imported sheep of both sexes. Exports also receive attention. Amongst these, two consignments from a well-known flock were made to Honolulu.

Fruit-industry.—The apple-yield is good and an estimate of 45,000 cases for export is made. This is a fair advance on last season's figure of 37,500, and would probably have been larger but for shortage of shipping space. Prices opened well on the Home markets, but have receded since. Stone fruits were affected by frost and heavy losses in small fruits are reported owing to continuous rains during the picking season.

Flax.—Two mills operate, and during the year 2,835 tons of hemp and 503 bales of tow were exported. The quality was up to the usual high standard of the local produce. A local firm is experimenting with the manufacture of bulrush into fibre for pulping purposes, and have dressed and exported six bales.

Pastoral Runs.—A systematic inspection of the pastoral country has been made during the year. Much of this country is gridironed, the early settlers having selected on the freehold tenure, as is but natural, the accessible and better class of land, leaving the rougher range country on leasehold tenures. By comparison with the carrying-capacity of days gone by, the major portion of this country has deteriorated considerably. The indiscriminate burning of the tussock and natural covering of the land, combined with the rabbit, has deprived the land of its natural vegetation, and laid it bare to attack by the elements, with the result that what it is judged were once good tussock ranges, hills, and spurs