

During October, 1929, the Department received from the High Commissioner, London, samples of two new varieties of woolpacks for trial purposes, and these packs were to be filled with wool by some of the sheep-farmers in the Dominion. Each lot consisted of twenty-five woolpacks, one lot being manufactured from paper, and the other from wire and paper, the paper being twisted round the wire. One each of the sample packs was retained at headquarters, while the balance were sent to Christchurch, where they were divided into eight lots of six packs each, and were then distributed among seven different sheep-farmers and one wool-scourer. Arrangements were made with each of these farmers to supply the Department with full information regarding the quality of these packs. The material contained in the all-paper woolpacks is too hard and makes the sewing of the cap to the pack a very tedious and slow process; in addition, the material cuts through both wool twine and cord twine during the process of sewing. When the pack is full of wool the outside surface is very smooth, and consequently the stacking of these packs is very difficult. These packs, however, stood the pressing, dumping, and handling very well. The material in the wire-and-paper woolpacks stood up very well under the pressing and dumping, but tore badly when being moved with the hooks, leaving broken ends of wire protruding which are liable to tear the clothes and hands of persons handling them. This material is also inclined to be too stiff, making it hard to sew the cap to the pack. As a result of the tests neither of these woolpacks appealed to the farmers, who still prefer the jute packs.

During the past year practical demonstrations on live sheep have been given, showing desirable points and the points to avoid; in addition, practical demonstrations were given in various shearing-sheds on handling the wool-clip for the market. Lantern lectures, with suitable slides, have been delivered, and all lectures and demonstrations were well attended by the farmers.

Microscopic examination of wool-samples: A considerable amount of this work has been carried out during the year, and reports thereon sent to each farmer concerned, as a guide in avoiding the use of faulty rams in the ewe flocks.

RABBIT NUISANCE.

The position of the country in respect to the rabbit pest has continued to be satisfactory, and on the whole the favourable position has been maintained and in some districts improved. There have been indications of a tendency to slacken off in the work of destruction in some parts, owing, no doubt, to the fall in the price of skins; but this position has been closely watched in order that any tendency in that direction may be as quickly as possible stayed.

The Otago-Southland District shows a more marked tendency in this direction than that of any other district, but, taking into consideration the condition of that district in respect to rabbits previous to the last few years, it is perhaps not altogether surprising under the circumstances now existing that they have shown up in slightly increased numbers in parts.

The export of rabbit-skins, which is a good index of the condition of the pest within the Dominion, has shown a decrease of 2,981,155 compared with the same period last year.

The Rabbit Boards have continued to do good work, and further demonstrated the value of local control. A sum of £13,155 was paid out by way of subsidy to Boards under the provisions of the Rabbit Nuisance Act.

NOXIOUS WEEDS.

Despite the earnest and active efforts of the Department and its officers, the area infested with noxious weeds does not, as a whole, appear to show any great improvement. This is specially the case as regards Californian thistle in Canterbury, blackberry in Westland, and ragwort in parts of the central portion of the North Island. Of course, in many localities these weeds are spread over either inaccessible areas or such poor lands that clearing is impracticable, and consequently enforcement of the Act is not possible. Nevertheless, in those localities that are fairly clear the Inspectors are making every endeavour to induce owners to do satisfactory work. While admitting that there are large areas of absolutely poor country badly infested with noxious weeds, and that the cost of clearing would, with the means at our disposal up to the present, amount to more than the value of the land, there is also this fact to take into consideration: that some fairly good land, potentially productive, is practically out of use owing to the growth of weeds.

The experiments on parasitic control of weeds, commenced by the Cawthron Institute, have not so far shown marked results, but probably the time has been too short, and landowners have had to depend on other means of control—namely, the methods that have proved most efficacious in the past. Unfortunately, cutting is merely a palliative and does not ensure eradication. Goats continue to give good results in regard to blackberry, and so far are the most effective means in use for the control of this plant. Ragwort has been largely controlled by the use of sheep where practicable.

The Department is anticipating great things from the use of sodium chlorate in respect to ragwort and perhaps some other weeds, and results already obtained from carefully conducted experiments are inspiring a cheerful outlook for the future.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION.

The inspection of shearers' accommodation, carried out on behalf of the Department of Labour, has been attended to as far as the other official duties of Stock Inspectors would allow. However, the inspection is carried out as well as possible in the circumstances, and shearers' accommodation is being gradually improved. On the whole, the accommodation provided is fairly good, and during the year under review a number of improvements, including new buildings, have been arranged between Inspectors and employers without any trouble.