

## REPORT.

### REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

REPORTS from all districts indicate clearly that the past year has been a particularly trying one for Crown settlers and their brother farmers throughout the country. Production generally was well maintained; but the extremely low prices ruling for our principal primary products have so seriously reduced the national income that the effects are being felt by all classes of the community. Climatic conditions also were not particularly favourable, the seasons generally being cold and stormy, and alternating between periods of excessive rainfall and dry spells, of sometimes serious duration.

It is clearly evident that the times call for increased production, both by the fuller utilization of areas already farmed, and by bringing into occupation all idle lands that are capable of successful development. The Department is taking an active part in the work of increasing the volume of the Dominion's primary products, and energetic endeavours are being made to open new areas for selection, while the position of tenants who find themselves financially embarrassed is receiving every consideration, particularly with a view to maintaining the top-dressing of pastures.

The complete loss of all land records through the destruction by earthquake and fire of the Government Buildings in Napier is proving a grievous handicap to the Department in carrying on its operations in Hawke's Bay. However, energetic steps are being taken to prepare new registers of tenants and holdings, and to compile as far as possible all the detailed information necessary for the efficient working of a District Lands Office. In this task the Department is receiving valuable assistance from local authorities, legal firms, and other offices; and, while it will be impossible to completely reinstate all records, it is anticipated that within a reasonable time sufficient will be accomplished to place matters on a sound working basis. In the meantime, the Department is successfully coping with current work that must be kept up to date.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands on all tenures during the year totalled 368,800 acres. The tenants on the books of the Department at the 31st March number 37,178, occupying a total area of approximately 19,300,000 acres. Pastoral runs account for over 9,000,000 acres, while 1,872,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

### LEGISLATION.

The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1930, gives additional powers for the disposal and development of Crown lands, the main provisions being briefly as follows:—

The Crown may sell land which is not considered suitable for close settlement under the Land Act to any company, firm, or person who will promote the development of such land. For this purpose the Governor-General is authorized to set any such land apart for disposal under special terms and conditions. Disposal is to be by way of sale or deferred payments spread over a term of twenty years, and subject to such special conditions as may be considered reasonable and desirable under the circumstances of any particular case. The grant of the fee-simple will not be made until all conditions have been complied with and the purchase-money paid in full. The limit of area fixed by the Land Act, 1924, as capable of being held by any one person will not apply to lands so disposed of; but the special consent of Parliament will be required before land in excess of 5,000 acres is sold to any one applicant, and in no case shall more than 50,000 acres be granted to any applicant.

Lands developed by the State may be set apart for allotment to persons who have actually been employed on work in connection with the development of such lands, and Land Boards are authorized to determine which of such persons shall have preference.

The Minister may enter into arrangements with the trustees of any institution or with any other body actively concerned in the training of youths for farming, whereby unoccupied Crown or settlement lands may be developed, and the services of the trainees utilized in carrying out the work. Any land so developed may be set apart for allotment to persons employed on the work.

For some considerable time the need has been felt for an elastic provision to facilitate the disposal of Crown lands which through general unattractiveness or other reasons have remained open for selection for lengthy periods. To meet cases of this nature the Act provides that Land Boards may, with the consent of the Minister, dispose of such lands to persons tendering or offering such less amount as may seem reasonable under the circumstances of any case.

Various machinery amendments which experience has shown to be necessary to facilitate the more effective working of the land laws in various directions are also included in the amending Act.

The Reserves and other Lands Disposal Act, 1930, contains fourteen clauses dealing with Crown lands, reserves, &c.

### LAND-DEVELOPMENT.

Good progress has been made in the development of unoccupied Crown lands, and a considerable area of gum and pumice country is in hand in various localities. The various advisory committees have been busily engaged, with the result that a fairly complete investigation has been made of idle lands remaining in the hands of the Crown. The position is changing from day to day as new areas are reported on, and more detailed reports come to hand on areas already investigated to some extent; but, from the information that has already been placed before the Lands Development