

TARANAKI.

(W. D. ARMIT, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

During the past year a later spring season than usual was experienced in Taranaki, and it speaks well for production that a small increase in butterfat is recorded over the previous year. Some of the factories with dual plant changed over from cheese to butter making late in the year, owing to the comparatively better price return for butter as compared with cheese. The season has been favourable to good yield on the whole.

Price returns this season have depressed the farming industry, and with falling values and decreased commodity prices the primary producer has been compelled to lean heavily on financial institutions and stock and station firms. A great measure of assistance has undoubtedly been extended to farmers.

Fat lambs for export opened at about £1 in Taranaki, but prices decreased very rapidly. Good lambings throughout the district were experienced. Numbers of sheep-farmers with held-over wool from the previous year have been compelled to accept a record low-level price for this wool, and a very slender margin over actual shearing and transport costs has been received for the average crossbred clips offered in this district.

Numerous applications for rental concessions are being received from Crown tenants, particularly from the grazing districts, and it is evident these will increase even more if the present low level of prices continues.

WELLINGTON.

(H. W. C. MACKINTOSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Crown tenants on both dairying and pastoral propositions have had a disheartening year, although the dairyman should be in a better position financially than his brother tenant, the pastoralist. The farmer who is depending solely on wool, lambs, and fat stock for his income has had a hard struggle for existence, as the poor prices obtained for his products have barely met working-expenses, and have provided nothing towards meeting his rent and interest obligations or the maintenance of his pastures. It will be necessary to carry these tenants on until markets have risen sufficiently to enable them to again meet their commitments.

In the northern portion of the district, towards Taumarunui, with the exception of a wet spring and early summer, weather conditions during the year were ideal from a farming point of view. The district was never better for feed, and hay crops were harvested practically without loss. Dairy-farmers have benefited by the top-dressing of their pastures, herd-testing, and the provision of winter feed. It is considered that they should get about 1s. per pound for butterfat, including bonus, and at this figure should just about pay their way.

In the Wanganui district similar conditions to those in the north have obtained. Favourable weather conditions and abundance of feed have enabled farmers to carry over stock which in a drier year they would have been forced to sell on a very weak market with heavy loss. Back-country tenants are still enjoying rent-remissions which were granted some years ago. Some of the roads in the district have been considerably improved under unemployment relief schemes.

In the Rangitikei district, as a result of a dry winter, dairy stock came into profit in good condition, and those dairy-farmers who are well established should come through all right with butterfat at 1s. per pound. The spring and early summer were wet, while the summer and early autumn were dry, but with very cool temperatures. As a result the "yolk" did not come up much in the wool, and fleeces were light. Prices for lambs were good in the early part of the fat-lamb season, but did not prevail through the season, and settlers had to accept very low prices for stock, as a result of which they will sustain losses on last year's purchases. The pastures of those settlers who have top-dressed show a marked improvement, and the returns have increased.

In the Wairarapa and southern portion of the district similar conditions to those in other parts have prevailed. In addition to poor prices, some settlers in this part of the district have had drought conditions to contend with, and have, in consequence, had a decreased supply of milk. For the most part settlers in these localities are becoming well established and with a return to normal prices will soon regain their former positions.

There is still a demand for better-class lands, but, for the most part, inquirers appear to be diffident about selecting farms while markets are so unpromising as at present.

NELSON.

(A. F. WATERS, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

From a farming point of view the outstanding feature of the past year has been the unprecedented slump in the prices of staple products. Wool, in particular, has fallen to prices far below the cost of production, which, if continued for any length of time, must involve the producer in ruin. Cases have come under my notice where wool has returned £2 10s. per bale to the grower, out of which must be paid the cost of mustering, shearing, and baling.