

The sheep-farmer has suffered a good deal. In some cases the previous year's clip had been carried over with the hope of an increase in value, but did not realize the prices anticipated. However, at the end of the season there was a distinctly better tone in the wool-market, with a more cheerful outlook for the settler. Surplus store sheep have been practically unsaleable and the plough has been put to use in an endeavour to carry over the winter. The dry season retarded fattening, but in most cases this class of sheep was disposed of under the reduced prices prevailing.

The dwelling properties continue in a satisfactory condition, although unemployment has increased the arrears slightly. Three houses are on hand for disposal.

#### WESTLAND.

(T. CAGNEY, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Owing mainly to low prices of produce prevailing, particularly throughout the latter part of the period, a number of soldier settlers hitherto regarded as being in a sound position are to-day applying to the Department for concessions. It is evident that, in common with other classes of the community, too much reliance has been placed on the assumption that the hitherto satisfactory prices of farm-produce would be maintained. Soldier settlers engaged in sheep-farming to any extent have been particularly hard hit, with lamb prices showing a decline of up to 50 per cent. on the previous year's figures, with wool in much the same position. Butterfat-producers, though seriously affected, have not been so hard hit, prices recorded to date showing a drop of approximately one-third on last year's figures.

One farm was abandoned during the early part of the year. This could not be attributed to low prices, but to the fact that the settler left to take up lucrative employment elsewhere; the farm has since been disposed of. In at least two cases the prospects of ultimate success by the settlers are extremely doubtful. Generally, however, soldier settlers are working their farms to the best advantage, and, gaining by experience of present low prices, may, with a reasonable improvement in this item, be expected to recover.

#### CANTERBURY.

(W. STEWART, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Soldier settlers, in common with other farmers, have had a hard year, and it is doubtful whether some of the weaker cases can make arrangements for carrying on any further. The scheme proposed by the Chamber of Commerce should enable those who are in trouble only because of the present reduced value of securities, to weather it; but those who were in difficulties before the present slump will hardly be able to secure credit to carry on through another season.

Where the Department is providing finance on current account it seems that in some cases we will be faced with the necessity to increase authorizations in order to keep the farms fully productive, or we will be prejudicing our settlers' prospects for the coming season as well. We have a few current accounts where this additional capital outlay does not appear to be warranted, and in these I see nothing for it but to close the accounts.

We have one soldier's section in our light dry plains area where the settler has reached the end of his resources and here it has been suggested that an experiment in irrigation be undertaken, as we have interests in large areas of similar land, where production can be greatly improved if such an experiment proves a success. At the present stage we have not yet been able to get the consent of the local body to increase the supply of water to this section in order to enable the experiment to proceed, but it is hoped this consent will soon be available.

#### OTAGO.

(N. C. KENSINGTON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

There is little to report as regards the soldier settlers. The majority are carrying out their obligations as well as the present financial position will allow, and those who have retained their current accounts for stock transactions with the Crown now recognize the wisdom, as the present position calls for every consideration. The revenue received in many cases is barely enough to meet cost of living and farm expenses, and leaves no room for the reduction of the account. With the Crown as mortgagee or landlord, and holder of the bill of sale over his stock, the soldier settler can regard himself as in an enviable position when he sees the many financial difficulties facing his civilian neighbour.

#### SOUTHLAND.

(J. MACDONALD, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

With very few exceptions, discharged soldiers' holdings in Southland compare very favourably with those of the older settlers. The returned men have proved themselves to be capable and progressive, and have been in the forefront of any movement having for its object the improvement of farming methods. Some have taken advantage of the low prices ruling for stock to cull out their flocks and herds, and replace the discarded stock with younger and better animals. It is pleasing to be able to state that not a single soldier's farm has come back into the hands of the Department during the past year.