

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL.

Wellington, 31st July, 1932.

THE HON. THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE,—

I beg to submit the following report on the work of the Department for the year ended 31st March last, including the usual Division reports and statement from the Phosphate Commissioner, also detailed reports on activities of the Chief Chemist, the Plant Research Station, and the Veterinary Laboratory.

## THE AGRICULTURAL POSITION.

Consequent upon unfavourable conditions in 1931, the continued increasing production which has been so noticeable during the past few years was checked to some extent. However, except in the case of arable crops, which showed a marked falling-off, the average yield per acre being much below normal, an increase has again to be recorded in our main products. In the case of dairy-produce yields can be best shown by taking the figures of each dairying year ending on the 31st July. In the period 1st August, 1929, to 31st July, 1930, the increase of butterfat production over the preceding year was 10·40 per cent.; from 1st August, 1930, to 31st July, 1931, the corresponding increase was 2·50 per cent., and for the year ending 31st July, 1932, the increase over the preceding year is 5·28 per cent. Considering the unfavourable season, this last-mentioned aggregate, which represents nearly 9,000 additional tons of butterfat, must be regarded as very satisfactory. A well-marked decreased average yield per cow occurred, and this would naturally have resulted in a decrease in the aggregate production of butterfat, but for the fact that it was more than counterbalanced by a greater number of cows being milked on dairy-farms, while a number of sheep-farmers started small dairy herds by way of assisting their finances in the face of low values for sheep-products.

The falling-off of the average milk-yield per cow was undoubtedly attributable in part to the cold dry spring weather, followed by a dry summer in large areas of the country, and the effect of this upon supply of feed. Another factor of importance was the decreased use of fertilizer top-dressing of pastures, due to the lowered purchasing-power of farmers. The provision of a subsidy on superphosphate improved the position, and it is evident that top-dressing on a more extensive and reasonably adequate scale is being brought about.

A feature of the year's operations lay in the heavy slaughtering of sheep and lambs at meat-freezing works, the figures for the twelve months ending 31st March showing an increase of 942,885 sheep and 491,707 lambs, the proportion of killings to total stocks being higher than usual. A larger proportion of old ewes than usual is included in the sheep figures, and this is bound to be reflected in the number of breeding-ewes returned in the next sheep returns. Owing to the seasonal conditions the wool-clip was somewhat lacking in style and character, while selling values reached a very low level. This, with markedly reduced prices for mutton and lamb, has seriously affected the finances of sheep-farmers. Additional trouble has been caused by low values for sheep and lamb by-products, and altogether sheep-farmers are having a very hard and anxious time. The heavy slaughtering already mentioned was doubtless the result of attempts to make as many realizations as possible. While the anticipated large reductions in sheep stocks cannot be regarded with equanimity it may have some compensating effect in reducing the bulk of wool to be marketed and thereby helping to harden prices.

The fruit crop of 1931 was a good one, and the quantity exported was some twenty thousand cases of apples and pears in excess of the previous season's shipments. The returns were good so far as sales in Great Britain were concerned, but losses were experienced on continental sales, owing to the serious financial collapse in Germany and its reflection elsewhere. This is unfortunate, as the previous season's continental sales gave good results. A call upon the Government guarantee ensued, the amount involved being £19,171. So far as the 1932 season is concerned the prospects are at present better from the guarantee standpoint.

The poultry industry is still making progress, but is hampered by a lack of proper organization. A strong effort is now being made to get the industry organized on a good basis, and, if successful, it should result in it being placed in the position so useful an industry deserves. A relatively small quantity of eggs were exported, but the realizations were considered satisfactory in the circumstances. The leaders of the industry exhibit commendable enterprise, and, if assisted in their efforts to obtain better organization, the endeavour to develop an increasing export trade should give good results.