

GISBORNE.

(H. L. PRIMROSE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Viewed from a production point of view, the past year was a very good one indeed. Heavy falls of rain were experienced in April, which gave the subsoil a much-needed heavy soaking after a previous dry spell. Very mild conditions prevailed throughout the winter. There was a splendid growth of grass in the springtime, which was marked by the distinct absence of the hot, drying westerly winds usually prevalent in the district at that time. Fortunately there were no drought conditions like those prevailing during the two previous summers. As a result, the dairying season should be a long one.

The most outstanding feature of the year has, of course, been the continuance of the chaotic slump conditions. Many sheep-farmers who were in a position to do so turned their hands to dairying at the beginning of the year, in the hope that butterfat would at least bring in a regular revenue for the better part of the year. Some men went to considerable expense buying herds, building sheds, and installing machines. Others, who usually run a few dairy cows, increased their herds and reduced their flocks. With an excellent dairying season and plenty of feed conditions seemed to favour the change, but with butterfat prices as low as 6d. per pound the prospects of a fair return on the capital outlay do not seem to be very bright. The dairying industry, however, has greatly benefited from the fillip thus given it, in so far as butterfat production has greatly increased, and also the number of cows milked. Some of our settlers on the Poverty Bay flats who suffered from the big flood in the previous year have not yet had time to recover from the setback. These are mostly small areas with little margin even in normal times, and their recuperative power is therefore not great. Some further assistance will be needed in such cases.

The main concern of the Department throughout the year may be summarized under three heads: (1) To keep the men on the land; (2) to keep up production; and (3) to see that the Crown obtained a fair share of any available surplus over and above living and running expenses. Our efforts in all three directions have been fairly satisfactory.

The position of arrears was vigorously attacked by the Land Board during the year, and every case considered on its merits, suitable recommendations being made consistent with the general financial aspect. Revenue is likely to still further decrease, and much postponing and remitting will require to be considered, especially where pooling schemes are in operation.

The inquiry for land during the year has been quite steady, the demand being for land suitable for dairying, preferably medium-sized places up to thirty or forty cows. Such land is, of course, very scarce at present, and if it can be made available under the Small Farms Plan it will be quickly selected by good men.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(J. F. QUINN, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The year has again been a disastrous one, the price of fat stock showing a decline on the previous year's figures, while wool, which it was anticipated would rise, remained about the same low level as last season. Last year dairying was payable, and large numbers of farmers went in for cows as a supplementary line in order to increase their returns. Unfortunately the price of butterfat, which rose at the commencement of the season, did not long remain at a payable level, but fell rapidly until at the close of the year it was down to 6d. Weather conditions throughout the year were normal for Hawke's Bay, heavy rain being followed by semi-drought conditions. There were heavy floods on the rivers early in May, resulting in damage to farms and blocking the roads. The winter was exceptionally severe, frosts being more frequent than usual. There were heavy falls of snow in the central district. Spring brought a wonderful flush of grass, and butterfat-production showed a great increase. The pastures held out until the end of December, when production fell off, but good, soaking rains fell in March, and the outlook for winter feed was greatly improved. Some excellent areas of lucerne were harvested on the Heretaunga Plains and other parts of the district. The area of perennial rye-grass entered for certification showed a considerable increase over last year, about 9,500 acres being accepted. Unfortunately a fall in prices affected the prospects of the growers. Oats and barley were not grown to the same extent this year, but what was sown produced good results. Rape and turnip crops suffered from the dry weather after the New Year, and these crops were badly ravaged by the white butterfly and the diamond back moth. A considerable area of wheat was sown in the Takapau district. A noticeable feature in the southern part of the district was the number of haystacks to be seen, settlers having been able to make ample provision for winter feed. Orchardists had a good productive season, and it is expected that upwards of 270,000 cases will be exported.

In the southern end of the district the severe winter affected dairy herds to some extent, many cows being late coming into profit. There was, however, no serious mortality loss in any part of the district, and stock should enter the coming winter in good condition. The lambing percentage was about 90, the figure being much above the average, the number of twins being very large. The wool was of excellent quality, and the average weight was higher than usual.

Further severe earthquakes occurred during the year; one on the 5th May did considerable damage to chimneys round about Napier suburban districts, and one on the 16th September affected the Town of Wairoa rather severely, completely destroying the old bridge over the river and giving a considerable setback to the new bridge in course of erection. After two years in temporary premises, the offices of the Department have now been transferred to well-equipped and fitted-up quarters on the top floor of the post-office building, and the operations of the Department can now be carried out without the inconvenience connected with makeshift offices, as in the past two years. The office work is now well established, new records have been built up and work of reconstruction of the Crown's titles and leases is well forward.