

WESTLAND.

(T. CAGNEY, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—The full effect of what promised to be one of the best seasons experienced in Westland for many years, from a climatic point of view, was to some extent diminished by excessive rainfall towards the end of the period. Farmers, however, had ample opportunities of saving sufficient supplies of both hay and ensilage, and in most cases readily availed themselves of the suitable weather conditions for this purpose, and are thus in a favourable position to maintain the condition of their stock throughout the winter.

I have again to report that a large additional area of farming land was brought into production during the period, assisted to a large extent by subsidized contract work under the No. 4B Scheme for the relief of unemployment. The work embodied mainly scrub-cutting, logging, and draining.

The low prices ruling for farm produce have, of course, seriously affected collection of rent and interest from Crown tenants and mortgagors, who, however, I am pleased to report, have made every apparent effort to meet their obligations, as far as possible.

Dairy-farming.—Butterfat-production figures for the period disclose a substantial increase compared with the previous period. Systematic group herd testing has now become firmly established, and the average production per tested cow for last season, of 233.59 lb. of butterfat, must be regarded as very satisfactory, and discloses an improvement on the previous season's average of 230.76 lb. per cow. The promise of better prices, based on an appreciable rise in the London market early in the period, was far from realized and, although the prices for the present season opened comparatively well, a rapid decline followed, and the average advance by factories towards the end of the period ranged in the vicinity of 7d. per pound.

Beef Cattle.—Beef prices have probably experienced a more serious reverse than those ruling for any other class of farm produce, and generally disclose a fall of over 30 per cent. on last year's prices. Recent local sales returned from 18s. to 19s. per hundred for ox beef, 15s. to 17s. for heifer beef, and cow beef in the vicinity of 13s.

Sheep-farming.—Fat-lamb production, though not extensively exploited in this district, has been well sustained, and shows an increase in last year's figures. Lambs from this district have always commanded relatively good prices at Addington, and this branch of farming might, with advantage, receive more attention than it does. The district is not particularly well adapted for wool-growing, and many farmers in the more isolated parts of the district still retain their last season's clip, which could not be economically transported to the markets. Old ewes and culls were practically unsaleable.

CANTERBURY.

(W. STEWART, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Climatic conditions have been favourable this year for the larger classes of farming in Canterbury. Rain in April brought away winter feed and allowed autumn wheat to go in under favourable conditions. Although the winter was marked by series of heavy frosts, stock mostly came through in good condition. The spring was wetter than usual and favoured rank growth. Lambing averages were good, though in some localities a few flocks had shown losses. Spring-sown wheat was not so successful as autumn wheat, and more of it was caught with rust and mildew. Some fruitgrowing localities were again caught with late frosts. Early fattening was not as successful as usual, owing to the rank, sappy growth and lack of sunshine, but mid-season conditions were good. Wool clips this season were mostly in good order, and weights improved. Dairy-farmers had good opening and mid-season conditions, but feed went off very quickly with the dry spell and severe nor'westers, and cows dried off much earlier than usual.

The rank spring and early summer growth has given an abundant supply of hay and oats, which will be needed on account of the failure of autumn and winter feed and new grass through the very dry autumn conditions. The weather was ideal for ripening and harvesting grain, and some splendid yields were obtained. All late classes of crops, such as potatoes, rape, turnips, &c., suffered, and most of the last-named failed altogether, having to contend with pests as well as drought. Late returns from small holdings have also suffered seriously.

Marketing conditions have been worse even than last year, and all classes of farming are now included, and the resulting financial stringency is exaggerating the conditions that were developing last year. Many classes of cull stock have now practically no value: it is hard to secure sufficient funds to keep up necessary maintenance, and rabbits are increasing.

The Department is meeting the position by remitting arrears where there is little chance of these being met from farm returns in the near future, and by reducing rentals temporarily in the classes of land most seriously affected by present economic conditions, which includes the high back-country runs and the lower-grade agricultural areas where costs cannot be reduced in anything like the ratio in which returns have slumped.

It should be mentioned that the position is also being similarly met by most private landlords and mortgagees, and that in many cases the Adjustment Commissions are being used as the machinery for setting out equitable apportionments between the various parties and establishing a minimum farm requirement to tide over the temporary difficult period.

Wherever possible, it is also attempted to employ extra farm help with assistance from the Unemployment Board to carry on development work such as gorse and scrub clearing, draining, extra fencing, &c. In this connection I might mention that our irrigation experiment at Seafield is now reaching the stage where some results are showing and gives promise of a method of greatly increased production and an opportunity for employment of much casual labour. Lincoln College Staff is keeping very useful records of all costs and results for future guidance.