

## WOOL.

With favourable weather conditions throughout the year the wool clip opened up in fair-to-good condition, with more combing wool than in the previous season. The practice, which has been advocated for some years past, of owners of small flocks skirting their fleeces and arranging for them to be "binned" by the respective wool-brokers has become an established practice, and is recognized as a decided advantage alike to the seller, the buyer, and the wool-broker.

The wool sales opened at Auckland on the 27th November, 1934, and closed at Wellington on the 12th April, 1935. The prices ruling for wool through the selling season were considerably below those of the previous year, although an advance as much as 1½d. per pound on the earlier sales took place towards the end of the season. A noticeable feature of the sales was a better realization in respect to neck pieces which more closely approximated their value when compared to prices received for fleece wool. During the selling season 521,625 bales of wool were offered, and 466,495 bales were sold, averaging 6·519d. per pound, equal to an average of £9 7s. 2·428d. per bale, showing a drop of 4½d. per pound, or £7 1s. 7d. per bale.

During the year lantern lectures and practical demonstrations were continued, aiming at improvement of wool by more careful selection of the rams, and to assist in this staples of wool from rams were examined and reports made, these serving as a guide to the owner in discarding faulty-woolled rams from their flocks. The number of sheep-owners in the Dominion as at the 30th April, 1934, was 29,800, this being a decrease of 263 on the previous year's figure.

## RABBIT NUISANCE.

The favourable climatic conditions of the past year in combination with the very low prices offering for carcasses and skins and the pecuniary embarrassment of many landowners have together accounted for an unfortunate increase in rabbits in many districts throughout the Dominion. The position, however, while serious enough to cause concern, has not assumed alarming dimensions, and where appropriate action has not already been taken arrangements are in train for systematic and simultaneous poisoning operations during the late autumn and winter months. Relief labour made available by the Unemployment Board was of material assistance in several areas during the past season.

The various Rabbit Boards have carried out their work satisfactorily. The advantage of Board control is now more widely recognized, and several new Rabbit Boards have been formed.

## INDUSTRIAL RABBITS.

Practically no interest is now being taken in the farming of Angora rabbits for wool and of other breeds for pelts, and district reports indicate that a number of rabbit-farmers have disposed of their stock owing to the time and trouble involved and the low returns obtainable. The Department has never fostered this industry, as its views did not coincide with the claims of the promoters.

## NOXIOUS WEEDS.

Notwithstanding the fact that considerable areas of land throughout the Dominion are weed-infested, and that in some instances the weeds are inclined to spread, there is justification for the contention that the position as a whole is better than it has been for the past few years. This remark is particularly applicable as regards ragwort in the North Island, where for a long time, with its insidious effect on stock and pastures, ragwort was an ever-increasing menace. For this weed large quantities of sodium chlorate have been put into use and applied either as a spray or in the dry state with lime, while the co-operation of the Unemployment Board in making available considerable relief labour for the clearance of weeds has been no small factor in the control of ragwort and in the results that are now becoming apparent. Some settlers complain of the cost of sodium chlorate as a weedicide, but the expense of application is really small compared with the old methods of clearing. The Government, however, subsidized all sales by 1d. per pound, thus rendering direct financial assistance for this work.

Attention has been given to other noxious weeds, principally sweetbriar, blackberry, Californian thistle, and gorse, in the respective districts in which they are more or less prevalent. The first-named is becoming a problem in some of the back country of the South Island, and trials with several specifics have been carried out with a view to finding the most practicable method for its eradication. As regards blackberry, it is pleasing to report that considerable areas have been cleared on the better class of land.

A noticeable feature of the season's work is that the administration of the Noxious Weeds Act has been carried through with practically no friction between officers of the Department and the settlers. Further, compared with previous years, there has been less adverse criticism concerning weeds on Crown and Native lands, on which considerable quantities of sodium chlorate and lime were used.

The amendment of 1934 to the Noxious Weeds Act should lead to better control. By this amendment County Councils are given power to assume responsibility for the administration of the Noxious Weeds Act within their respective counties, and at the end of the year nine Councils had taken over the administration of the Act, particularly in order to deal with ragwort. The amendment also simplifies the problem of dealing with defaulters and altogether will be helpful in bringing about an improvement in future years. The spontaneous response of these local authorities to administer the Act within their respective boundaries augurs well for the future and merits the fullest support that can be given. It is anticipated that other bodies will follow suit when the benefits become apparent.

## STAFF.

I am again pleased to express my appreciation of the services so loyally and efficiently rendered by the staff of this Division in every section and branch of its activities.