1890.

NEW ZEALAND.

# MANUFACTURE AND GROWTH OF PHORMIUM OR FLAX

(REPORT ON THE).

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

The REGISTRAR-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,— Registrar-General's Office, 26th July, 1890.

As it was deemed desirable to obtain some information respecting the phormium- or flax-industry in the colony, the Collectors of Agricultural Statistics were instructed to obtain the names and addresses of all the flax-mill owners or managers in their several districts. These were then sent to this office.

A letter in the form of Schedule A to these papers was thereupon sent to each millowner or manager, together with a form according to that shown in Schedule B.

According to lists furnished by the Collectors of Agricultural Statistics there were in March, 1890, 315 flax-mills in the colony. In response to the circulars, replies have been received from 246, and tabulated—10 were returned indorsed "No mill," "Left district [*or*] colony," or "Unclaimed." Of the 59 from which no returns have been received, 4 were noted in the Collectors' lists as "in course of erection," and 2 "not working," thus leaving 53 mills not accounted for.

The following tables have been compiled from the returns sent in, and in addition a précis has been made of the statement by each millowner, which will be found following the tables.

The total number of hands employed was 4,807—namely, 3,360 men, 1,444 boys, and 3 girls, giving an average of nearly 14 men and 6 boys to each mill. This does not represent the full number of hands indebted to the flax-industry for employment, as in many cases the number returned is only of those employed in the mill, exclusive of cutters and carters, many flax-millers paying a certain amount per ton for the raw material delivered at the mill, instead of employing hands to cut and collect the green leaf.

The tow shown in the table is far short of the actual quantity produced. It represents only the amount hackled or sold, the bulk of the tow being burnt or otherwise destroyed, there being no sale for it.

The estimated output of dressed fibre for the year 1890 cannot be relied on as correct, the output, of course, depending upon the market-value.

The average amount of green leaf used to produce 1 ton of dressed fibre is rather more than 7¼ tons. This, of course, varies considerably, from about 5 tons or less to 10 tons, according to the excellence or otherwise of the machines used and the soil on which the flax grows, that growing on the dry or hill lands producing more fibre in proportion to weight of raw material than that cut from swamp lands, where the quantity of vegetable matter is, owing to the dampness of the soil, excessive.

The time growing leaf will last is variously estimated from a "few months" to "continual supply." Several millowners state that, before the present available leaf is exhausted, if care be taken to protect the plant from cattle, the second growth would be ready for cutting.

Flax is cultivated only to a very small extent. In Auckland Provincial District, 1,042 acres (including 800 acres by draining swamp land; in Taranaki Provincial District, 130 acres; in Marlborough Provincial District, 85 acres; in Nelson Provincial District, 100 acres: total, 1,357 acres. But the cultivated plant is reported to be greatly superior to the wild.

In reply to the question if present output would be increased with improved machinery, 141 millowners reply "Yes," 54 "No," and 51 do not advance an opinion one way or the other. Of the 54 who have recorded "No," several (about twenty) add, "but quality might."

I have, &c.,

WM. R. E. BROWN,

Registrar-General.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.