

WAGON SUPPLY AND UTILIZATION

During the year the greatest difficulty has been experienced in supplying sufficient wagons to meet all demands.

The greatest concern to the Department has arisen from the difficulty in supplying wagons for the distribution of fertilizer and lime.

For the year ended 31st March, 1947, 729,023 tons of agricultural lime was conveyed by rail. In 1939 the total tonnage was 379,504 tons, and this has increased progressively during the intervening years due to two reasons: an increased use of this commodity for agricultural purposes, plus its use as a replacement for artificial manures, which were not available in sufficient quantities during the war years.

The tonnage of artificial manures conveyed by rail for the past year amounted to 917,998 tons, an increase of 128,114 tons as compared with last year. Imports of raw material for the manufacture of artificial manures became more regular during the year ended 31st March, 1947, and the indications are that the tonnage of this commodity will increase substantially during the current year.

Since the war, vessels with rock phosphate and sulphur supplies have been unable to work the port of Wanganui, with the result that each phosphate-vessel which discharges an average of 9,000 tons at New Plymouth requires to rail 4,500 tons to Aramoho for the works there.

It is realized that the prompt distribution of supplies of fertilizer is necessary to the production of essential foodstuffs, and in this connection it is worthy of notice that supplies of fertilizer for the rich farming areas of Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa have to be railed from the fertilizer-works at Smart Road and Aramoho. This long haul, combined with other factors which will be mentioned later, contribute to our difficulties in having an adequate supply of wagons for the requirements of our clients.

When consideration is given to the fact that over a period of ten months, out of a total of 80,744 tons railed from these works, 28,476 tons were for distances in excess of two hundred miles, it will be realized that the construction of a fertilizer-works in Hawke's Bay is necessary to deal with the ever-increasing demand for fertilizer in the eastern part of the North Island.

In anticipation of such works being constructed in the future, the Department has already taken steps to select a site for a suitable marshalling yard adjacent to Port Ahuriri where the heavy traffic which must develop can be dealt with expeditiously.

In the case of fertilizers the difficulty in supplying wagons has been met by the work that has been done through co-operation between the Department of Agriculture, area carriers, and the Railways Department. As a result of the shortage of railway wagons, a scheme had been operated for the cartage of manure by road generally within a radius of fifty miles of the works. It was found, however, that without some control private lorries were being dealt with at the works while on occasions railway wagons were left idle. Furthermore, some short-distance manure traffic continued to be sent by rail. In August, 1946, a system was evolved whereby the use of lorries was controlled by the Railways Department and regulated according to the availability of railway wagons. Each means of transport was used in its most economic sphere—*i.e.*, road transport was used for short-distance traffic and rail for long-distance. Loading was also regulated so as not to clash, and thus the minimum standing-time for both lorries and railway wagons was involved. By this arrangement 48,105 tons of manure were handled by private lorries.

The Railways Department handled all carriers' accounts, debiting the works and the Agriculture Department with their proportions. Although the only return to the Railways Department was a commission to cover administrative expenses, the scheme has been most satisfactory to the carriers and the farmers and has resulted in better use of railway wagons.