

SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT OF 1908.

Fruit Ordinance.

The Fruit Inspection and Diseases Ordinance, 1909, came into operation on the 6th August, 1909.

This Ordinance is framed practically on the same lines as the Orchard and Garden Diseases Act, New Zealand.

The Inspector in Charge to be appointed from Department of Agriculture, New Zealand To assist him six Natives were appointed, one for each village—viz., Matavera (1), Muri and Ngatangia (1), Titikaveka (1), Arorangi (1), Avarua (1), Avatiu (1). Their duties are as follows: (1.) To inspect plantations before every steamer leaves Rarotonga, or as directed by the Inspector. (2.) To report to the Inspector any plantation not kept clean or free from disease. (3.) To see that no fruit is sold or allowed to be removed from any unclean or diseased plantation without the permission of the Inspector. (4.) With the approval of the Inspector, to instruct Natives as to the picking and packing of fruit. (5.) To see that the instructions of the Inspector for the control, prevention, and eradication of diseases in their respective districts are carried out, and that all diseased fruit is destroyed. (6.) To assist the Inspector on wharf in inspection and fumigation of fruit should he require assistance.

I am pleased to report that under the circumstances—viz., the wild, uncultivated state of plantations—these Inspectors have done good work, while their assistance when inspecting fruit for export has been valuable, and willingly given.

The inspection of plantations and fruit for export having been carried out for some months previously to the Ordinance coming into operation, the shippers and Natives suffered no hardship when called on to comply with its provisions.

The erection of a fumigator was taken in hand by Mr. Connal, Engineer and Surveyor to the Administration, and a substantial concrete building has been erected, with capacity of 1,000 cases of fruit—two rooms of 500 cases each. The building is connected with the Union Steamship Company's wharf and sheds by a tramway. This will facilitate the work of fumigation to a great extent by preventing any delay in clearing the fumigator during a large shipment. The fumigator will be in order and ready to treat next season's fruit.

Packing and Handling.

The inspection of fruit for export has, I feel sure, already proved a benefit to the industry, but there is still room for improvement in the class of fruit shipped. For instance, Natives will pack well-coloured (yellow) and black oranges together in the same cases, instead of packing each in separate boxes; thus spoiling the appearance of the fruit when opened. I notice one or two of the Europeans are given to this fault.

I should also suggest that packers of good marks be able, by paying a small fee, to get their marks registered. I notice a great deal of changing and copying marks going on, and buyers in New Zealand may think they are purchasing a reliable mark, and find out their error to the detriment of the original mark next time of purchase; hence I think it only fair that packers of good marks should be afforded an opportunity of protecting themselves by registering their marks.

I notice some packers curing(?) their oranges by letting the fruit be exposed to the direct rays of the sun. In a climate like we have in Rarotonga I must condemn this practice, and quote the following information on the subject from a well-known authority: "By drying oranges in the sun there is a possibility, if not of fermentation setting up, at least injury to the skin, and consequent decay. What is required is shade and a gentle current of air to remove the moisture from the skin, leaving the oils, and rendering the skin less susceptible to bruising."

Plantations.

The inspection of plantations has been going on, but it is a hard matter to get the Natives to clean the scrub from under the fruit-trees and to gather and destroy fallen fruit. When a Native takes it into his head not to work, he takes a lot of argument and persuasion to get him to move—in fact, in most cases, it is only waste of time to argue. Still, now that the Ordinance is in operation, and the work of cleaning the plantations a necessity, we shall have an opportunity of making offenders "toe the mark."

In one or two instances I have noticed the fruit-trees, especially oranges, neglected on European plantations. I regret that this is so, as we have to rely to a very great extent on the good example set by Europeans to get a proper system of control of pests and diseases organized and in effective working-order.

I hope in the future I shall never have occasion to comment unfavourably on any of the European plantations, but sincerely hope that the planters will afford us all the assistance they can in setting a good example to the Natives, and supporting the provisions of the Fruit Ordinance.

Preservative Solutions.

I have on several occasions been asked by shippers to express my opinion on preservative solutions. I can only state that, acting on instructions from T. W. Kirk, Esq., Government Biologist, Wellington, New Zealand, I have been treating fruit for some months past. These experiments have to be carried out thoroughly in every respect, and under every condition, climatic, shipping, and degree of ripeness of fruit; hence some time will elapse before the Department can make known results of experiments. At present I should suggest that shippers wait until the Department's report is issued; otherwise they might lose fruit by trying solutions which have never been tested under the conditions and climatic influences of these Islands.