

SIR,—

Rarotonga, 3rd April, 1911.

In compliance with your request, I have the honour to submit herewith my first annual report of the fruit industry of the Cook Islands for the year ended 31st March last.

PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS.

The prospects of the fruit industry are encouraging, with the exception of the shipment of bananas by the mail-steamer. It is to be regretted that the Fiji steamer is timed to arrive in Wellington the same day—a glut can be anticipated, to the detriment of both Islands. Up to the end of December bananas supplied for the New Zealand markets were principally drawn from these Islands, owing to the disastrous effects of the hurricane experienced in Fiji last autumn. The high prices prevailing gave considerable impetus to the industry—Natives encouraged by the excellent returns planted more freely than previously. Little or no coconut planting was done by Natives of Rarotonga during the year. Though good prices ruled for copra, banana-planting took precedence.

RAROTONGA.

Fruit Ordinance: The Fruit and Diseases Ordinance has been in operation some twenty months. The provisions are now rigidly enforced, and its value fully appreciated by growers and shippers. Bananas, the principal perishable product of the island, have steadily gained favour in the New Zealand markets. Inspection, insuring well-filled cases of good-quality fruit has done much to bring this about. One or two shipments during the year were landed in more or less unmarketable condition, the fruit arriving overripe. The good name we now possess can only be maintained by despatching good quality and fairly well filled fruit. Exporting of over-matured or thin immature bananas of little substance would prove disastrous. The former would arrive in more or less rotten state; the latter are avoided and not desired by buyer or consumer. These bananas carry well, but three or four shipments of such fruit during the hot months would be detrimental to the industry; the island would soon get a name for inferior fruit, the price would naturally be lower, and it would take months to re-establish our present footing.

The erection of the fumigator has greatly benefited the orange industry of the island. Some 46,000 cases were fumigated during the year. There is no question of the advantage of fumigation this end; the fruit, not being delayed for fumigation at the port of entry, is able to compete on equal footing with the French and outside islands. Fumigation in no way interfered or influenced detrimentally the carrying qualities of oranges and pines treated. The fruit arrived in equal condition to that of previous years when no fumigation was carried out.

A careful inspection of oranges was made during the season, but the effort was not altogether successful; some 900 cases were condemned for fly in New Zealand. Inspection of oranges takes place prior to their entering the fumigator, which is to be regretted; on the other hand, it is unavoidable. It is impossible to open more than a small percentage of cases, as, the bulk of the fruit coming forward in the last two days, the time available for inspection is very limited.

To the privilege extended to shippers to repack lots found to contain fly I attribute much of the unsatisfactory results. Several lots found to contain fly here and privileged to repack were destroyed on arrival in New Zealand for fly-infection. This emphasizes how difficult the fly is to detect when, after repacking the fruit and a second inspection, it should be found necessary to destroy at its destination. Rigid inspection of this fruit is most essential, and repacking should on no account be allowed.

A regulation, which I understand is forthcoming, setting out that oranges punctured by fly, thorn, or other instrument shall be deemed unfit for export, will minimize the risk of fly-infected lots passing observation. Much of the infection found last year was in the egg stage, and detected only by handling the fruit, the one indication being the emission of juice when gently squeezed. The idea of the regulation is to compel packers to handle the oranges and discard everything punctured. Such a regulation will be of great assistance to the industry, and no hardship to growers.

PLANTATIONS.

Plantation inspection for the control of the fruit-fly was commenced early in the year, and carried on systematically for some few months. The work of gathering and destroying the oranges was not carried out satisfactorily by Natives. I regret I had to practically abandon the work, it being found that the legal means provided by Ordinance were not sufficient to force good work and cope with the pest. An amendment is urgently needed to allow this essential work to proceed in an effective manner if the orange industry of this island is to be fostered.

FRUIT-FLY.

There is no doubt this pest is firmly established on the island, and its control is of the utmost importance to the expansion or even preservation of the orange industry. Investigations prove the fly to be on the wing in large numbers during the whole year. It attacks fruits of various seasons when matured or ripe enough to provide food for the young grubs. When the orange-crop on the flats is finished the fly wanders to the stray trees on the hills and in the numerous valleys. Infection is carried by these stray trees, and even from the main orange-crop to the early mangoes. Mangoes, as they ripen during the summer months, are freely attacked by fly, and with guavas the infection continued up to the winter, when early oranges provide suitable food for the fly upon which to continue its work of destruction. I am fully convinced by observation extending over two mango seasons that the fly is as partial to mangoes as to the oranges.