

REPORT OF FRUIT INSPECTOR.

SIR,—

Rarotonga, 11th April, 1913.

I have the honour to submit my report on the fruit industry for the year ending 31st March, 1913.

Progress and Prospects.

Fruit exports show a slight decline, bananas falling away considerably. The drop is due to a stiff blow experienced in April last year doing great damage to banana-plantations.

The shortage of bananas in Fiji during the last three years, coupled with the influence of supply and demand, kept up the price of this fruit; a good average price throughout being maintained. Oranges locally did not do so well, heavy shipments in the early part of the season causing a glut, the market taking a long time to recover. The reported hurricane at Fiji make prospects very bright the coming year. Natives are lax in planting, only a few of the more enterprising extending their plantations. This is to be wondered at in view of the handsome returns for bananas the last three years, and the high prices of copra.

Export Inspection.

The packing and general appearance of fruit from Rarotonga is all that can be desired when it is considered how brief the period is since this was instituted.

A drastic change in the method of dealing with infected lines of oranges will have to be made to reduce the risk of fly-infected fruit being shipped. Last year there were heavy condemnations in New Zealand. In the past it has been the custom to allow shippers to sort over infected lines, and submit the fruit for inspection a second time. This on no account should be allowed, as indicated in my report two years ago. It is not fair to the Inspector or shipper, as sufficient time does not elapse between the two inspections for egg-infection to develop and become apparent. The greatest care must be exercised when packing oranges. With the right of repacking a Native is very lax—he thinks nothing of repacking a hundred cases. Not only care in packing is needful, but Natives must learn to leave an interval of at least three or four days, and longer if possible, between picking and packing, for the maggots to develop. A Native does not help himself or the Inspector by placing his fruit for inspection at the earliest opportunity after gathering, as has been the custom in the past.

The inspection of coconuts for shipment to America was brought under this heading last November. Earlier in the year a shipment of nuts was quarantined at San Francisco for being infected with maggots. To assist the trade, inspection has since been carried out, and the risk of maggoty nuts being shipped under inspection is reduced to a minimum.

Fumigation.

All fumigation this past year was done under large oiled canvas tents in the Union Steamship Company's sheds. This innovation has proved advantageous, and has saved much handling of the fruit.

Fruit-fly.

In addition to the fruits mentioned in previous reports I found fruit-fly maggots in coconuts and alligator pears, and have since reared the adult fly from both. I have only reared seven flies from coconuts, but nevertheless it shows that in fighting this pest the coconut has also to be considered. Infection takes place in coconuts through decayed eyes; infection in alligator pears took place in open wounds.

Plantation-inspection for the control of this pest was continued during the year. With only Native assistance one cannot look for the best results. Constant European supervision is most essential: a Native will not perform his duties faithfully, fearlessly, and without favour. With inspection of coconuts the Inspector's time is taken up on the wharf for practically three weeks out of four during the orange season, the period that plantation-inspection requires most attention.

In company of a planter I counted twenty-seven fruit-flies on one orange-tree. One female was observed to pierce an orange with her ovipositor. The oranges under the trees were found to be fly-infected. This example alone illustrates the absolute necessity of destroying all fallen fruit, thus preventing the fly breeding.

The orange crop last year was very heavy: this provided the fly with abundance of food to carry on its work of propagation. This year the crop is the other extreme—the comparative scarcity of food will probably mean a decided reduction of the pest.

Outlying Islands.

Schooner arrangements allowed me to pay two visits of inspection to Atiu, also one each to Aitutaki and Mangaia.

Atiu.—The condition of oranges at this island on my visit was poor, cases badly made, and improperly and loosely packed. Practical demonstrations in packing and handling were given, the result being very marked. The following shipment was all that could be desired, the packing and general conditions being splendid.

Aitutaki.—The Aitutakians are the best orange-packers in the Group—a very pleasing feature of the industry of this island. The banana-packing could be much improved.

Mangaia.—A good deal remains to be done at Mangaia to bring packing and general condition up to reasonable standard.

Periodical visits at irregular intervals to the outlying islands would have a good effect if they could be arranged without unduly interfering with the work at Rarotonga.

Fruit-fly, Outlying Islands.—I found fruit-fly at Atiu both in the maggot stage and on the wing, and at Mangaia in the shipment; also in a transhipment of oranges from Mitiaro.

I have, &c.,

The Resident Commissioner, Rarotonga.

GORDON ESAM, Fruit Inspector.