

Utility poultry-keeping has made further progress both on a commercial scale and as a side-line. The attention given to breeding of late years is now yielding good results. The organization of the industry is being steadily effected, especially as regards marketing. The local markets have shown their capacity to easily absorb the increased egg-production at average prices very remunerative to the producer, while there is a standing unsatisfied demand for well-fattened table-poultry.

Stimulated by record prices, the hemp industry has shown great activity and a largely increased production. During the latter part of the year trade was hampered by lack of shipping space in the Home steamers, but the position has since been partially relieved. A considerably larger proportion of low-grade fibre was produced as compared with the previous year, and the same remark applies to tow. This is a regrettable feature, tending to react unfavourably on the trade, especially when world-conditions become normal again. During the year the attacks of the grub *Xanthorhoe praelectata* caused serious damage to the phormium-leaf in the Makerua Swamp, one of the most important sources of supply of the raw material of the industry. An experienced entomologist is now specially investigating this pest with a view to its control.

The allied subjects of the supply and application of phosphates and of lime (generally speaking, the chief requirements of New Zealand soils) have continued to engage the attention of the agricultural interests. No material developments can be recorded as regards discoveries and working of rock-phosphate deposits in New Zealand, although a higher bonus was offered in this connection. The cutting-off of supplies of basic slag by the war was partly countered by importations of Egyptian basic phosphate on returning troopships. This business was conducted entirely by private enterprise, and a reasonable rate of shipping freight was paid by the importer. The Government, however, arranged with the importing firm for a moderate maximum price for the phosphate on the New Zealand market, this rate comparing favourably with prices recently payable for the same article in other countries.

Considerable activity has been shown in prospecting and opening up deposits of limestone, which fortunately occur in nearly every part of New Zealand. Special attention has been given to soft-limestone deposits, in Canterbury and elsewhere, yielding a supply of carbonate of lime in a state more or less ready for soil-dressing purposes. The use of lime in the carbonate form as distinguished from burnt lime is becoming more general, as the result of a better understanding of the matter by farmers. It is pleasing to note enterprise and self-reliance on the part of the agricultural community in regard to supplies of lime. A company formed among farmers in the Wellington District has recently purchased the deposit and works of the Mauriceville Lime Company, and intends to largely increase the output. In several cases local bodies have taken up the matter of lime-supply for the benefit of their districts. It is found as a rule that Government assistance need not go beyond advice and general guidance. The Department is conducting an effective liming campaign by the dissemination of information, the conducting of demonstration plots, and other means.

It is becoming steadily more recognized that agriculture offers an almost unlimited field for State action in scientific research, education, and practical assistance to the agricultural industry. In New Zealand, although much good work has been done on these lines, those controlling the Department of Agriculture are alive to the fact that little more than the fringe of the manifold problems has been touched. An extension of systematized and co-ordinated investigation work is pressingly required in several directions. Such activities, however, involve a substantial increase in scientifically trained men and funds to maintain the extended staffs. The winning of a lasting peace will, it is trusted, make available before long both the men and the money. Comparatively inexpensive and simple measures, such as the establishment of small demonstration farms at various points—more especially in the South Island—may probably be undertaken without delay, but projects in the nature of a proposed central research station fully equipped and staffed must perforce wait.

In the foregoing report the principal features of the year's agricultural industry in New Zealand have been very briefly reviewed on broad lines. A general account of the work of the Department is furnished in the accompanying report of the Secretary, and further details are supplied by the heads of the several Divisions and Sections. It only remains for me to express my appreciation of the work of the staff of all branches of the Department—work performed in many cases under manifold difficulties, due to war-conditions and other handicaps.

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