

immediate or great improvement over any extent of country can scarcely be expected. I think the generally expressed desire of the country is in favour of effective suppression, but the question is how this is to be satisfactorily carried out. Agricultural and pastoral associations and many County Councils and local bodies are mostly in favour of the continuance and administration of the Act. This would appear to be an intimation that the Department should adopt more vigorous measures than it has perhaps hitherto. Lately the Board of Agriculture distributed a large number of circulars to farmers and also to the Fields Inspectors, asking for information as to the weeds considered the worst, and their opinion regarding means of control. A good deal of valuable information has been received in this way, and when properly compiled this should become exceedingly useful as a guide.

The general condition as regards weeds is that in very many localities useful work has been effected, and on agricultural lands this is clearly shown. Improvement is not so generally noticeable on grazing or pastoral districts. Where the lands are timbered owners can scarcely be expected to effect much till these lands are cleared of timber. The efforts of the Inspectors to repress weeds are showing useful results. The same difficulty—shortage of labour—applies here, and more acutely than in the suppression of the rabbit pest. It has to be borne in mind that it would be impossible to effect immediate clearance over any large areas except at great cost and hardship, and this is a point the officers take into consideration, and where it is found that reasonable work is being done under the Act owners are not harassed.

There are still a number of so-called “weed-destroyers” advertised, but none prove really effective. Some are fairly so, but the cost is prohibitive; others are dangerous to live-stock; the effect of some is that the land is unfit for other plants for a long period. Experience has shown that the application of any of these is not the most effective way of dealing with weeds. Cutting or grubbing of some plants, judicious stocking and grazing methods on pastoral properties, and intelligent cultivation and cropping systems on arable lands, prove the best means of control.

A large amount of work has been done on occupied lands this season, settlers realizing it pays better to have the ground in crop or grass than in weeds. Inspectors and others are still faced with the question of dealing with the trouble on Crown and Native lands, reserves, absentee sections, &c. The only hope of dealing effectively with this is to get the lands occupied and cultivated. Certainly sums of money are spent on these lands, but they are quite inadequate to cope with the trouble. Still the action of spending what is appropriated has had a most encouraging effect on settlers who may have properties adjoining these unoccupied lands.

#### NEW ZEALAND HEMP INDUSTRY.

The following report is furnished by the Chief Hemp Grader (Mr. W. H. Ferris) on his branch of the Division:—

The year just ended has been one of continued activity and prosperity for the hemp industry, both in production and export, the demand for our fibre having been extremely keen throughout. The output graded exceeded last year's figures by 11,623 bales, and the prices ruling were a record for the Dominion.

The ports of Auckland and Bluff showed an increase of 7,140 and 8,667 bales respectively, and the ports of Foxton and Picton a decrease of 2,358 and 740 bales respectively. The increase at Auckland and Bluff was due principally to the reopening of a large number of small mills (which had been closed down for years) owing to the highly remunerative prices ruling. The decrease at Foxton was due to floods and to certain of the larger mills having to close down some of their strippers owing to shortage of labour. During the winter months millers as a rule close down in order to attend to their swamps and to avoid the risk of exposing the flax-bulbs to the effects of the frost; but this year was an exception, and practically every mill throughout the Dominion, where possible, worked during the whole of the season.

The drought in the Manawatu district was responsible for the destruction by fire of about 800 acres of millable leaf. Loss by fire does not end with the destruction of the existing crop; the plants are so weakened that they take a considerable time recovering, and very often are destroyed outright.

*Quality of Hemp.*—I regret to again have to state that during the year there has been a further increase in the proportion of lower grades of fibre produced. One of the principal causes of the production of lower grades was the very small difference in prices offering between good-fair (which should be our standard grade) and fair. At one period during the year London quotations showed only a difference of 10s. per ton between these grades, and although the difference is now £1 per ton it is still far less than warranted by actual quality. At the prices ruling millers are content to aim at no higher grades than high-fair and low-fair, as a greater output can be obtained by them and at a less cost of production. The weather conditions on the whole were fairly good for milling, the chief exception being the Auckland District, where the continual wet weather interfered greatly in the production of a good grade of fibre. The green leaf throughout the Dominion, especially in the Manawatu district, was in a decidedly better condition than the previous year, the fibre showing no signs of the blight or flax-grub. This can be attributed to the very heavy floods which occurred just at the time when the grub began to attack the green leaf. Most of the “rejected” hemp which come into the grading-stores during the season had been damaged by flood-water. The percentages of good-fair graded at the various ports are—Auckland, 4 per cent.; Napier, 60 per cent.; Wellington, 15 per cent.; Foxton, 24 per cent.; Picton and Blenheim, 76 per cent.; Bluff, 10 per cent.

*Quality of Tow.*—The quality of tow still leaves room for improvement, the chief and usual defects being lack of cleanliness, or freedom from dust and rubbish, and it is to be regretted that millers will not take more care with this by-product. As will be seen from the attached tables, the first and second grades of tow show a decrease of 4 per cent. in each case as compared with the previous year, while the percentages of third grade and condemned are correspondingly higher. Auckland and Bluff show up worst in quality of tow graded. Although the output of hemp shows an increase of 11,623 bales, that of tow shows a decrease of 1,360 bales. The decrease is accounted for by the larger proportion of low-grade fibre produced, for which the hemp is scutched to a lesser extent than for higher grades.

*Stripper-slips.*—The quality of stripper-slips continues to improve, the percentage of first grade showing an increase of 8 per cent. on the previous year. Owing, however, to the poor demand, combined with the low prices offering and high freights, millers did not take the trouble to prepare this by-product in any quantity for the market.

*Shipping-space.*—During the year the matter of shipping-space presented a very serious difficulty, especially as regards shipments to the United Kingdom. At one period the port stores were so congested that a large number of millers throughout the Dominion had to practically cease work for three or four weeks. Fortunately, however, shipping prospects improved, and fairly large quantities of hemp were also shipped to America and Australia, although at the present time fair quantities are still awaiting shipment.

*Prices.*—The following were the price-movements for hemp, f.o.b., during the year: April–June, good-fair £34 per ton, high and low fair £33 and £32 per ton respectively; July–September, good-fair £36, other grades £1 less in each case; October–December, good-fair £39, high-fair £38 10s., low-fair £37; January–February, good-fair steadily increased from £39 to £48 per ton, with other grades £1 less in each case. During March good-fair was quoted at £52 10s., high-fair £51 10s., and low-fair £50. The price of tow ranged from £9 to £17 per ton for first grade, with second grade £1 per ton less, fluctuating with the increases in freight and shortage of space in oversea steamers.