

The shortage of staff caused by officers enlisting for active service is, however, seriously interfering with the proper carrying-out of departmental work, it being a very difficult matter to secure suitable men to replace those on leave. Nevertheless every endeavour is being made to cope with the extraordinary conditions prevailing, and extra hours are being worked by the majority of the staff.

Fruit-markets.

The inspection of auction markets and fruit-shops has been carried out as regularly as possible under the existing circumstances, and the Inspectors report that the bulk of the fruit arriving on the markets is clean and well graded. In a number of instances immature fruit has come under their notice, being sent in, no doubt, with the view of catching the high prices prevailing. This is, of course, a great mistake, and only tends to considerably lower the price of really good fruit. Prices realized during the season for good-quality fruit have been very satisfactory to the growers. The light crops secured in a number of the fruitgrowing areas no doubt had a tendency to keep prices up.

Export of Fruit.

Owing to the disorganization caused in shipping by the war, and changes of steamer routes, very little fruit was exported during the year. A total of 19,246 cases was shipped to South America at the beginning of the season, the bulk of the fruit coming from the Nelson District. The Inspectors report that the fruit was of good quality, well graded, and the packages attractively got up. Only in a few instances was loose packing noticed.

The following figures show the quantities of fruit exported from the Dominion during the export season of each of the last five years, the bulk of it being apples: 1912, 14,869 cases; 1913, 33,000 cases; 1914, 67,964 cases; 1915, 62,164 cases; 1916, 19,246 cases. It is expected that when shipping arrangements again become normal these figures will be greatly exceeded, and that the export of fruit will eventually develop into one of the leading industries of the Dominion.

Pruning and Spraying Demonstrations.

The increasing requests for practical instruction in the pruning and spraying of fruit-trees take up a good deal of the Orchard Instructors' time. Following the usual custom adopted in former years, demonstrations on these subjects have been carried out by the Orchard Instructors in their respective districts during the winter months. That the demonstrations are greatly appreciated is evidenced from the large and enthusiastic attendances of fruitgrowers and others who are anxious to adopt the most up-to-date methods of orchard-management. This practical advice afforded is of immense benefit to the fruitgrowing industry generally.

Certificates in Pruning and Spraying.

Examinations of persons desirous of obtaining the Department's certificate in pruning and spraying are conducted each year in the various centres. Since these classes were established four years ago some forty persons have qualified in the subjects mentioned.

Apple Grading and Packing Classes.

Classes in apple grading and packing have now been firmly established in the leading fruitgrowing districts, and are well attended. This is a very important feature in the building-up of an export trade, and the value of these classes cannot be overestimated. Already quite a number of persons have gained the Department's certificate in fruit grading and packing.

Cool Stores, Fruit-packing Sheds, &c.

The erection of suitable cool stores and central fruit-packing sheds in the chief fruitgrowing centres is now receiving considerable attention. Under the Fruit-preserving Industry Act advances are made by the Government for the establishment of *bona fide* cool stores for fruit, fruit-packing sheds, fruit-canning works, and other works in connection with the packing, grading, or preservation of fruit. This assistance is being taken advantage of to a large extent, and several stores and packing-sheds have been built and others are in course of erection in different localities. These establishments will provide a long-felt want, particularly in those districts where large quantities of fruit are now being handled.

Co-operative Fruit-testing Plots.

The establishment of co-operative fruit-testing plots was commenced in 1911. Since that date some sixty-four of these areas have been planted in different localities throughout the Dominion. They are proving an excellent means of demonstrating what varieties of fruit are best suited for certain districts, and also up-to-date methods of pruning, spraying, and cultivation. The results obtained from some of the earlier-planted plots are now coming to hand, and will be published through the medium of the Department's *Journal*. This information should be very valuable to fruitgrowers generally, who have evinced a keen interest in the work carried out on these test areas.

Testing New Spraying-compounds.

Any new spraying-compounds coming under the notice of officers of the Division are carefully tested for the purpose of ascertaining their reliability for the control of orchard pests and diseases. Previously these tests were carried out by the Orchard Instructors, but as their time was fully taken up with other work the operations are now conducted at the horticultural stations under the control of this Division. Several specifics have been tested at these stations during the year, and the results obtained will be published in due course.