

The Effect of the Noxious Weeds Act.

Peculiar as it may seem, the replies as a whole show that the Noxious Weeds Act has had a most peculiar effect on the common-sense and individuality of the farmer himself. The Noxious Weeds Act lays it down that the cutting so as to prevent flowering is the basis of all weed-control. Thus in a very large number of cases the only method of control for weeds gazetted as noxious that was given was to cut down so as to avoid flowering, the farmer realizing that the acceptance of this procedure satisfied the present inspectorial system. In marked contrast were the replies as to control of weeds such as couch-grasses, yarr, bracken, water-fern, piripiri, manuka, and other weeds not included in the Noxious Weeds Act. In such cases the replies indicated an intelligent appreciation of practical methods of reducing the loss of production due to these weeds. The value of sound management directed towards actually controlling such weeds was emphasized, and in no case was satisfying the provisions, often quite impracticable, of an Act of Parliament the objective desired. I think on the whole this was the most remarkable feature of the replies in general. Another point that was very noticeable was that certain gazetted noxious weeds, especially Californian thistle, were mentioned as the most serious weeds of the district, irrespective of whether they were causing any appreciable harm or not. In many cases, after enumerating Californian as the worst weed of the district, a footnote was appended to the effect that little if any of the weed existed in the district. This widespread fear of Californian was most noticeable in districts where it is not as yet particularly widespread; in those where it is abundant it is evidently held in less dread.

Contradictory Opinions.

As was to be expected, very contradictory opinions on the value of cutting down annually such weeds as Californian thistle and blackberry were expressed in the circulars, even from the same district. In certain cases cutting alone was advocated and said to be effective, but the reverse was stated in the majority of cases. Really scientific evidence on the value of cutting is much wanted.

Variation of Control on Individual Holdings.

A very important point that regularly cropped up in many of the replies was the necessity for the same owner to adopt different methods of repression on different parts of his property. This indicates that the question of dividing land up in different belts, as has been often suggested, is a very difficult matter, and really each farm needs to be separately dealt with. The need for this was well exemplified in many of the answers, which showed that the average farmer was very desirous of controlling weeds in every case where measures could be profitably adopted, but showed a strong reluctance to deal with land where control was simply directed towards a reduction in flowering without any other direct benefit being secured.

The Prevention of Infection from Infested to Clean Land.

It was very remarkable that in the majority of cases very little stress was laid on the necessity of control on what is virtually waste land or completely infested land. The theory that control should be directed to avoid further infection had on the whole few advocates, except in certain districts, notably in the wheat-belt of the South Island. The actual repression of weeds and future profitable employment of badly infested areas, provided the work was practicable, was emphasized in many replies—that is, the improvement in *utility* of weed-infested areas was the dominant note struck. This, of course, is to be expected from farmers who deal more with the individual than the national aspect of weed-control. But if individual effort directed against weed-repression—that is, more or less complete eradication—becomes general, then it follows that the national aspect is more fully satisfied than under the present system. It, however, was notable that farmers not particularly troubled with weeds were desirous in most cases of making their less fortunate brethren carry out the Act in its entirety.

The question of the non-cutting of weeds on Crown and Native land was frequently dealt with, and the consensus of opinion was that the work of cutting should be rigorously carried out, but in only a few instances did the private owners suggest that they should carry out the same method on their own properties. It, however, was noticed that in but few instances was there any suggestion that the Act should be repealed, but that it should be virtually inoperative over certain types of privately owned country was repeatedly pointed out. The desire for information on rational methods of suppression, especially with weeds not in the Noxious Weeds Act, was very general, and indicates once more the urgent need of a proper weed-survey dealing with all phases of the subject.

The General Tone of the Replies.

It was with very great pleasure that I noticed the great care and attention that had been given to the filling-in of the forms as a whole. Only in a few instances were the circulars treated more or less as a joke. The farmers' propensity for humour could not in certain instances be repressed, and the replies "Go to the war, young man," and "The local Inspector is the worst noxious weed of the district," naturally made their appearance on two of the forms. Serious attention towards the circular was, however, a notable feature, and indicates clearly the important position weeds and their control occupy in the minds of farmers.