

Manufacturing Technique.

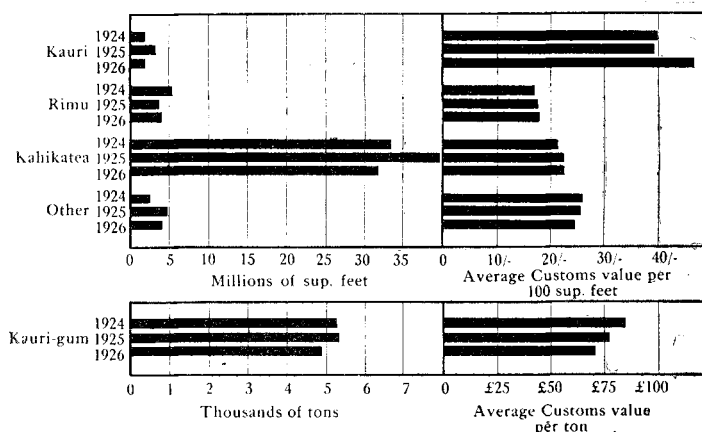
Manufacturing technique has improved little during the year under review. With mills working at a lower percentage of their capacity than ever before, this is not unexpected. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for new operators to invest in a better type of equipment than formerly. The Canadian type of log-carriage, for instance, is coming into wider favour, while other labour-saving devices are gradually being installed. Portable rigs, too, for the exploitation of plantation timbers are rapidly being modernized.

Operators continue to show an increasing appreciation of proper drying methods, improvements in air-seasoning technique being clearly evident in every section of the country. More and better grade fillets are used than formerly, vertical air-spaces through piles have become common practice, and box-stacks are replacing the old one-end stacks. Low pile foundations (often they are only 6 in. off the ground) remain the most serious defect in present-day piling practice. In the dry-kiln field little progress has been recorded, but arrangements have now been completed by one of the most progressive South Island timber-merchants for the installation of a modern scientifically controllable kiln. This marks an important step forward in dry-kiln progress in New Zealand.

Competition with imported softwoods has also served to stimulate interest in grading and marketing methods, and there is every indication that the official organizations of the industry will review their policies in these fields of effort within the near future.

Exports.

The year ended 31st December, 1926, was the poorest experienced by the export trade for over twenty-six years, and contrasted strongly with the heavy exportation reported for 1925. The actual quantities exported for the two years were 41,953,879 ft. b.m., valued at £490,247, in 1926, and 51,549,439 ft. b.m., valued at £605,187, in 1925. Thus, while the quantity fell away by approximately 10,000,000 ft. b.m., the average f.o.b. value for all species maintained the high level experienced in 1925, the figure for the latter year being 23s. 6d., and for 1926 23s. 4d. per 100 ft. b.m.



GRAPH SHOWING ROUGH-SAWN TIMBER AND KAURI-GUM EXPORTS FOR YEARS ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1924-26.

The white-pine trade, with an exportation of 31,767,504 ft. b.m. and a unit value of 22s. 6d. per 100 ft. b.m. during 1926, compared with 39,748,206 ft. b.m. and a unit value of 22s. 5d. during 1925, received the severest setback it has experienced in the history of the trade. It alone accounted for almost the whole decrease in the year's export trade. Inquiries made on the Australian market, which absorbs most of this timber, indicate that considerable stocks have accumulated during the past two years, due largely to the abnormally low exports of dairy-produce and to increased competition by North American and Baltic shelving and box timbers. Indeed, the trade is so overstocked that the white-pine export market is likely to remain dull for the greater part of 1927.

During 1926 rimu exports totalled 4,000,370 ft. b.m., valued at 18s. per 100 ft. b.m., compared to 3,709,934 ft. b.m., valued at 17s. 8d. per 100 ft. b.m., exported in 1925. Rimu continues to move slowly in the Australian market, which has been captured largely by North American and Baltic timbers, especially for flooring and lining purposes. To compete with these timbers on a price basis the f.o.b. price of rimu in New Zealand would require to be from 14s. 6d. to 15s. 6d. per 100 ft. b.m.

The exports of kauri during 1926, amounting to 1,987,046 ft. b.m., with a f.o.b. value of 46s. 8d. per 100 ft. b.m., correspond closely to the averages of recent years. The 1925 exports, totalling 3,238,693 ft. b.m., with value of 39s. 3d. per 100 ft. b.m., were abnormal, owing to the shipment of a quantity of sap-grade timber, which was moving very slowly on the domestic market.

Beech, as predicted in previous years, continues to find favour abroad, 2,392,734 ft. b.m., valued at 25s. 7d. per 100 ft. b.m., being exported during the year. It appears, however, that a revision of the New Zealand grading system and a detailed study of the export-market requirements would assist materially in securing a more balanced utilization of the products of the log and in widening the avenues of utilization for this valuable hardwood.

The re-export of foreign timbers to the Pacific islands, &c., also increased during the year, reflecting the increased use of these timbers by importers of dairy-produce, and fruit-containers for their export trade.