

HORTICULTURE DIVISION.

REPORT OF J. A. CAMPBELL, DIRECTOR.

THE FRUITGROWING INDUSTRY.

The climatic conditions prevailing generally throughout the Dominion during the 1935-36 fruit season were not at all favourable for the satisfactory carrying-out of orchard operations, particularly in regard to spraying, and fruitgrowers have experienced a somewhat trying time.

Conditions earlier in the season indicated that the crop would be above the average, some districts carrying heavy crops both of pip and stone fruits.

These encouraging prospects were, however, considerably upset by a gale of exceptional force, accompanied by heavy rain, which swept the North Island on the 2nd February and caused severe damage in a large number of commercial orchards, some growers losing from 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. of their crop, as well as having many fruit and shelter trees blown over. In a number of instances the tomato and other crops were ruined by flood-waters. Assistance to those growers who were in financial difficulties as the result of the storm was afforded by the Government by means of loans, and this is being taken advantage of by a considerable number of those affected. In a portion of the Motueka District extensive damage was caused to the apple crop by a hailstorm.

Russetting of apples, due to weather conditions, in combination with spray applications, was very prevalent, and considerably affected the quantity suitable for export.

The season was also favourable for the development of fungous diseases, such as black spot, &c., but, generally speaking, was not conducive to the spread of insect pests, and as a result red mite, codlin-moth, leaf-roller caterpillar, &c., were more readily kept under control.

Fireblight has not made any serious headway during the year; any outbreaks have been small, being chiefly confined to isolated trees in domestic orchards, which were promptly dealt with.

Although fruitgrowers, in common with other primary producers in the Dominion, have suffered from the effects of the world-wide depression, there are signs of an improvement in marketing conditions, and it is satisfactory to note that the majority of growers are showing an optimistic spirit. Their faith in the future of the industry is shown in the maintaining of their orchards in good condition and the installing of up-to-date methods of orchard cultivation, control of diseases, &c. Progress is specially noticeable in the installation of stationary spraying-plants which enable spraying-operations to be carried out at the proper time irrespective of the state of the soil. With portable outfits much valuable time is frequently lost when the land is in too wet a condition for haulage. The increased number of up-to-date fruit-grading machines in use is also a distinct sign of progress.

Citrus-fruit culture is making satisfactory headway, more especially in the northern districts, which are well adapted to the growing of this class of fruit. The total area now planted in citrus fruit is approximately 1,884 acres (lemons 1,300 acres and oranges 584 acres). During the year 72 acres of lemons and 50 acres of oranges were planted.

Good seasonable crops of lemons have been obtained, and while there is a noticeable improvement in the grades and keeping-qualities of the fruit offered for sale on the local markets, further efforts in this direction are still desirable. Careful and methodical attention to orchard-management generally and in the harvesting, handling, and curing of the fruit are factors of the utmost importance in connection with successful citrus-growing. Growers have shown a keen desire to improve their knowledge by attending in goodly numbers field-days and addresses which were arranged for their benefit.

Regulations covering the grading and packing of citrus fruit were brought into force in December last, and growers are gradually working towards the standards required.

The New Zealand grape-fruit (Poorman orange), Morrison's Seedless strain, is rapidly coming into favour as a breakfast fruit since the practice of allowing it to ripen upon the trees has been adopted, and further plantings are taking place to meet the demand.

The preliminary work in connection with the establishment of a citrus grading and packing shed on a co-operative basis at Keri Keri, North Auckland, is nearing completion, and it is anticipated a commencement will be made with building operations at an early date. This movement should prove of inestimable value to the industry, which is assuming considerable proportions in that district. Several investigations have been conducted into various matters in connection with the industry, and others are contemplated.

Passion-fruit culture, which a few seasons ago gave promise of being developed on a large scale in the North Auckland District, has not progressed to any extent during the past two years. While a considerable proportion of the fruit produced is disposed of on the local markets, it is understood that the company engaged in extracting and exporting juice is experiencing some difficulty in finding a market at a payable price for their product.

While there has been a slight extension in general orchard planting during the year, this has been largely offset by the cutting-out of certain areas that have become unprofitable. It is estimated that the total area in commercial orchards in the Dominion is in the vicinity of 27,000 acres, of which some 11,700 acres are situated in the North Island and 15,400 acres in the South Island.

EXPORT OF FRUIT.

The long spell of hot, dry weather experienced during the 1935 growing season considerably affected the quantity of apples suitable for export purposes. The climatic conditions were also favourable to the development of insect pests, and in the Auckland District codlin-moth infection greatly reduced the export of the Delicious variety.

As a result of the abnormal conditions the quantity of fruit exported overseas during the 1935 season was the lowest since 1929, the total number of cases shipped being 1,063,420, which was a decrease of 511,492 cases as compared with the previous year's figures (a heavy export year).