

AGRICULTURE.

During the year the Assistant Director of the Horticultural Branch of the New Zealand Agriculture Department, Mr. W. T. Goodwin, was seconded for duty *vice* the late Director of Agriculture who died as a result of an accident sustained in the hurricane of 1935, and the following are extracts from his annual report :—

Citrus.—Most of the citrus trees throughout the island which suffered badly as a result of the hurricane experienced at the latter end of the preceding year are now making fairly good recovery. Although the citrus fruit crop is comparatively light, the new growth of wood gives good promise for a return to more or less normal conditions in future years. The low prices prevailing do not provide any particular incentive for the Native producers to take the interest in their trees that might be expected, but with an improvement in market conditions better results in that direction should be obtained.

The pruning and renovation of many of the trees on the islands growing under wild conditions in the bush is a question about which one has an open mind. In many instances this work attendant with that of spraying, manuring, and other cultural practices is an almost impracticable proposition.

If the Islands are to successfully compete in the commercial fruit trade with other countries, more modern practices of culture and preparation for market will no doubt have to be introduced, and it is my opinion that the present haphazard methods of production will have to be superseded eventually by the laying-out of new plantations to be established in conformity with modern practices.

This may be done gradually in order to have plantations coming on to take the place of the trees now becoming decadent and which may be expected to depreciate year by year.

Bananas.—The planting of bananas was undertaken to some extent after the hurricane and throughout the year, and many of these plants are now coming into fruit, with the result that the production of bananas in the immediate future may be expected to be maintained at about the normal over the last five or six years.

The total export of bananas for the period was 22,539 cases, 22,458 from Rarotonga and 81 from Aitutaki, which represents a considerable reduction on fore-running years, and many be largely attributed to the damage done during the hurricane, which resulted in light shipments during the early part of the year.

Tomatoes.—Considerable plantings were made of tomatoes after the hurricane damage as a supplementary crop to replace losses suffered by other crops. Low prices, however, experienced before all the crops had matured, caused many of the planters to neglect their plantations which reduced the crop accordingly.

Notwithstanding this, 62,383 boxes of tomatoes were exported, approaching double the quantity shipped the previous season.

Coconuts.—Coconut palms generally are thriving well. The export of nuts in the husk and otherwise has amounted to a total of 1,028 packages (mostly sacks)—1,003 from Rarotonga and 25 from Aitutaki. In addition a number of loose nuts were exported through the Parcels Post Branch.

Copra-making has not been very extensive throughout the year. The total quantity of copra exported being 1,353 tons from the whole Group, for the period under review.

Domestic Crops.—Increased plantings of products for local consumption such as taro, kumaras, yams, melons, &c., were made after the hurricane season, and these served to tide the Native population over a lean export season, which, together with the low price returns, reduced the island income considerably from outside sources.

Planting Statistics.—A tabulated list of plantings in the island of Rarotonga for the year, compiled from statistical information obtained at half-yearly periods, is attached hereto.

Noxious Weeds.—Due to the general upset of agricultural work in the early part of the year noxious weeds, in some instances, got rather out of hand. Inspections have been duly made and warning notices issued with the result that in most places a general cleaning up is now being made.

Rat Menace.—The question of dealing with the rat pest on the island has been given special attention and steps are being taken to try the effect of various rat poison baits under controlled conditions with a full realization that safety to human life must be given first consideration as a precautionary measure.

Manure Levy.—The levy for the purpose of supplying manure to the Native fruitgrowers at Rarotonga to benefit their respective crops has been collected on all fruit exported with the exception of three shipments.

A distribution of manure purchased by means of this special fund was made earlier in the year and another 57 tons has just come to hand for further distribution.

Packing-sheds.—The packing-sheds have been kept in good order, and all fruit grown by Native producers has been passed through these sheds for grading and packing under supervision of the inspectors. As funds allow it is hoped that increased facilities for this work will be made available.

Registration of Fruitgrowers.—All fruitgrowers on the Island of Rarotonga have been registered and an up-to-date system of recording the registrations has been installed.

Steps are now being taken for a registration of fruitgrowers on the Island of Mauke.

Every registered fruitgrower is supplied with a registered number stamp for marking each case of fruit grown by him for export.

Organization of Fruit Industry.—The fruitgrowers of Rarotonga have recently organized themselves into a producers' association known as the Rarotonga Growers' Association.