

HORTICULTURE DIVISION.

REPORT OF J. A. CAMPBELL, DIRECTOR.

THE FRUITGROWING INDUSTRY.

Orchard operations during the 1936-37 season were considerably hampered by the changeable weather conditions experienced, particularly during the growing period.

The fruit crop varied to a considerable extent in the main commercial growing areas—some districts producing average crops—while in others both pip and stone fruit were on the light side.

In Marlborough and a portion of the Otago Central district conditions were more favourable, and good to heavy crops were secured.

Growers in the Hawke's Bay district suffered a further reverse in the form of a very heavy frost in October which practically wiped out the whole of the fruit crop, only a few orchards on the outskirts of the affected area escaping. This, following the severe damage caused by the gale in February, 1936, left many growers in a very unfortunate position financially. As a result also of this disaster all subsidiary industries in the district such as boxmaking mills, cool stores, canning factories, &c., were seriously affected. Frost relief in the nature of sustenance and a subsidy on wages paid for labour was granted to those growers who were badly hit and unable to carry on. The assistance given was much appreciated by the industry and will enable growers to pull through till next season who otherwise would have been obliged to abandon their orchards.

Frost damage to a lesser extent also took place in the Gisborne district and a portion of Central Otago and considerably reduced the fruit crop in the affected areas.

In the Motueka and Mapua districts hail damage affected the quantity of fruit suitable for export from those areas.

In most districts small fruits—gooseberries, raspberries, and strawberries—yielded good crops. The tomato crop, however, was a disappointing one, the continued unfavourable weather retarding ripening, and early frosts rendered the remaining crop useless.

The inclement weather conditions interfered to a large extent with the carrying-out of spraying operations generally and rendered the control of fungous diseases such as black-spot somewhat difficult.

Insect pests as a whole were not so prevalent as in former seasons and were more readily kept in check.

Fireblight disease was not conspicuous during the year, any slight outbreaks being promptly dealt with, and the position generally is satisfactory.

There has been a steady improvement in the general standard of orchard management, growers realizing the necessity of producing crops of good fruit at a minimum of cost.

This has become more vital in view of the increased wages now ruling and the reduction in working-hours, and growers generally will require to concentrate on not as to how much fruit they can produce, but the quantity of fruit of high quality that can be shown for the season's work.

In order to meet the higher cost of orchard labour the Government has decided to subsidize growers in cases where the average market return for fruit is below the assessed fair return, and all commercial orchardists have been notified accordingly.

The citrus industry, the youngest of our agricultural industries, is continuing to make progress, more especially in localities in the Auckland, North Auckland, and Tauranga districts, where the soil and climate are suited for the growing of citrus fruits.

The total area now planted is in the vicinity of 2,000 acres (lemons 1,400 acres and oranges 600 acres).

Good seasonable crops of lemons and oranges have been obtained and prices generally have been satisfactory for good-quality properly cured fruit.

It is considered that with the trees now in bearing and those planted in recent years coming into full production, more than sufficient lemons will be available to meet local requirements for some time to come. There is, however, plenty of room for development in regard to sweet oranges, provided the quality is satisfactory.

Growers are gradually complying with the requirements of the regulations relating to the grading and packing of lemons brought into force some eighteen months ago, and it is anticipated that before long only fruit complying with the respective standards will be found on the markets.

This is highly necessary in order that a good reputation for New Zealand citrus fruits may be built up and any prejudice that may at present exist against the local article removed.

The co-operative citrus-curing and packing shed at Kerikeri, Bay of Islands, is now practically completed and is expected to commence operations at an early date. At Tauranga the Citrus Growers' Association is at present installing an up-to-date air-conditioning plant in its store.

These improvements are a step in the right direction and should greatly assist in the orderly marketing of citrus fruits in the Dominion.

Investigations into various matters connected with the industry, such as manuring and curing, are being conducted by the Department, and others contemplated cover the processing of by-products.