

## No. 139.

SIR,—

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 3rd February, 1905.

See  
No. 125.

I have the honour to forward attached letter from the committee appointed by the residents of Rarotonga to investigate and report upon the capabilities of the Cook Islands to produce fruit for the New Zealand market.

I have on several occasions commented severely on the inertness of the Native inhabitants in the matter of planting cocoanuts, and their inability to look a few years ahead, but any remarks I may have made as to their want of energy will not apply to the growing of bananas.

Hitherto this industry has not been undertaken in a systematic manner, but now the people are planting thousands of the best varieties of banana, and the committee in their report do not overestimate the capacity of the island to produce all that New Zealand may require.

Let me point out that the prices now obtained are satisfactory, but we feel that any increase in production unless protected would lead to such a fall that we should probably have to stop the export.

I have, &amp;c.,

W. E. GUDGEON,

Resident Commissioner.

The Hon. C. H. Mills, Minister administering the Islands, Wellington.

## Enclosure.

SIR,—

Avarua, Rarotonga, 1st February, 1905.

The committee appointed to consider the letter of the Minister in Charge of the Cook Islands Administration has the honour to report as follows: That in the absence of statistics showing the quantity of tropical fruit consumed annually in New Zealand, with details showing the relative amounts of oranges, pines, and bananas, the committee is somewhat at a disadvantage, and would be glad, if you could procure such details for it, to go further into the matter. Meanwhile, the committee has no hesitation in saying that in a reasonable time the whole of the fruit needed in New Zealand can be supplied by these islands.

*Oranges.*—At the present time a very large proportion of the oranges grown are not shipped, but left here to rot, in consequence of the unremunerative prices obtainable for them, and there is no doubt that this Group can now supply the whole of the oranges needed.

*Bananas.*—In reply to the Hon. the Minister's question, "How long it would be, after a definite promise of protection has been made?" &c., the committee would point out that since the visit of the Hon. C. H. Mills to these islands (upon which occasion he held out some hope that the fruit industry might be protected, but made no definite promise to that effect), the output of bananas has increased from 62,000 bunches in 1903 to 90,000 bunches in 1904, and we estimate an output this year of 140,000 bunches. This increase is largely due to the Hon. the Minister's promise that he would see if something could be done in the matter, and an increase of 50 per cent. per annum could, there is no doubt, be maintained so long as there was a remunerative market.

*Pines.*—With an assured market these can be grown in unlimited quantities.

Your committee would suggest, as a remedy for the present unsatisfactory state of affairs, the imposition of a duty upon foreign fruits as follows: Upon oranges and bananas,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound; upon pine-apples, 1d. per pound; upon coffee, a return to the old duty of 2d. per pound; a duty on cocoanuts and limejuice.

That these duties should be further increased by a sum equal to any reduction in freight or rebate upon freight made by the carrying companies in favour of foreign fruit, should such reduction be made, as was the case when the Australian Commonwealth imposed a duty upon Fijian bananas. Your committee cannot conceive that these duties would enhance the price of fruits to the consumer, and would point out that, in spite of an identical duty of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound upon apples, the price of that fruit is as cheap in New Zealand as before; also, that the abolition of the duty on coffee has not made that article any cheaper to the public, while the reimposition of it would give the grower here sufficient protection to enable him to compete with the cheap American article, and revive an industry which at present is likely to be abandoned altogether in the near future.

In conclusion, the committee cannot refrain from again impressing upon the Minister that the geographical position of the Cook Group is a natural disadvantage, as compared with Fiji, and that to that extent Fiji is protected, and New-Zealand-grown fruit penalised, and they cannot urge too strongly the necessity for dealing with the subject promptly, lest with the increasing output an unremunerative market disheartens the Native growers, and retards the development of the Group very materially, by checking the increased production which has taken place on the strength of the hopes held out to growers by the Hon. the Minister.

The Committee has, &amp;c.,

J. W. SHARPE.

THOS. SHEARMAN.

PERCY BROWN.

MAKEA DANIELA.

The Resident Commissioner.

## No. 140.

SIR,—

Rarotonga, 3rd February, 1905.

In reply to your letter No. 250 of the 21st December last, I have now the honour to return herewith amended notices under section 3 of "The Cook and other Islands Government Act, 1904," which will supply the information you require.

No. 114.