

*Progress and Prospects, Rarotonga.*

The fruit-output for the year shows an advance of over 15,000 packages, the highest increase being oranges. The orange crop last year was admittedly good, but the marked increase is also due to the fact that the Natives picked "hard," allowing no fruit to remain on the trees.

Bananas: The comparatively dry winter and spring, together with the cool weather prevailing at that time, retarded growth and development of this fruit. These conditions largely influenced the banana-output for the year, the greater portion of the previous year's planting not coming in till January and February of this year.

In Wellington particularly and the southern ports of New Zealand generally the supply of Island fruits has been on occasions greater than the demand, hence reduced values resulted. This unfortunate condition of affairs was brought about by the clashing of the mail-steamer with the Fiji fruit-boat at Wellington. The present arrangement is an injustice to both Fiji and Rarotonga, and from reports one can hold out little hope of improvement the ensuing year.

The average amount of yearly clearing and planting has been undertaken by European planters. A fair extent of new blocks of bananas have been set by Natives. This work was not as large as the previous year when hurricane prices ruled.

Last spring 1,450 citrus trees were imported from Australia by private enterprise. The Administration also introduced for testing purposes six varieties; these were placed with three growers who have undertaken cultivation, &c. It is agreed and arranged to distribute buds from these trees to test their success on the wild-orange stock.

*Export Inspection.*

This branch is on a good basis; nothing but well-packed and good average-quality fruit is passed for export. Dealing with bananas, all direct shipments turned out in good order and condition. Some southern transshipments *via* Auckland turned out badly; indifferent results at southern ports can generally be anticipated by this route. Bananas from May to October were below average quality, the weather prevailing being against good development of the fruit.

A very noticeable feature when inspecting oranges for fruit-fly was the large amount of infection in the egg stage; very few fully grown maggots were found in the oranges submitted for export. This can be accounted for in two ways—the exercise of greater care on the part of the packer, and in submitting the fruit for inspection the same day that it is picked from the tree, or the earliest opportunity thereafter. This new method, which has been adopted by numerous Natives, is a great mistake, and certainly makes the work of detecting the presence of "fly" much more difficult. When oranges are condemned in Rarotonga it means loss of fruit only, whereas if condemned in New Zealand there is a further loss of the case, freight, destruction and other charges, amounting in all to at least 3s. per case. To reduce the risk of condemnation to a minimum at Rarotonga, and particularly at New Zealand ports, oranges should be kept after picking for at least three or four days before being packed, and submitted for inspection.

During the year ninety-five cases of oranges from Rarotonga were condemned for fruit-fly infection in New Zealand, against over nine hundred the previous year. There were no condemnations for this disease from the other islands of the Group.

The packing of oranges is all that can be desired, but the fruit suffered greatly in the large amount of handling at the fumigator.

I am of opinion that export of oranges should be prohibited from December to April. The fruit that has been sent forward at this period during my three years' experience has been green and unripe. Green oranges contract what is commonly known as "spotting," a disease causing numerous small discolorations of the skin. When oranges are more advanced and fully coloured the disease is almost entirely absent. Spotting is also noticeable on oranges from the other islands of the Group, so it cannot be put down to fumigation, though I am of the opinion if oranges are wet when fumigated the gas aggravates the disease. This spotting spoils the saleable appearance, and no doubt discredits the orange industry in this island. Oranges shipped from April on develop little or no spotting.

*Brands.*

A system of marking cases whereby the fruit from each individual island of the Group could be readily distinguished at the port of destination should be instituted. With such a system in operation the fruit from each island would be sold on its merits. At the present time it is possible by using the same mark to sell Rarotonga oranges for Atiu, and Mauke fruit for Aitutaki, and so on. The local system at present applicable to Native shippers at Māngaia could well be applied to the other islands. Māngaia has in use a circle, Aitutaki could have a diamond, Atiu a triangle, and Mauke a square or oblong. Māngaia shippers use figures inside the circle; letters would be equally as serviceable. Rarotonga marks could remain as at present, with the exception of a few which would cause confusion with the foregoing method. A way would need to be provided whereby such marks now registered could be cancelled.

*Fumigation.*

Fumigation of oranges and pines was carried out in accordance with the Fruit Ordinance. The capacity of the fumigator was quite inadequate to deal with some of the large orange cargoes, and much of the fruit had to remain for some time in the open. Fortunately the weather was very favourable and little or no fruit got wet. The practicability of fumigating in tents on a large scale will be tested the coming season, a special tent for the purpose having been ordered. The Union Steamship Company have agreed to allow the testing to be carried out in their large open cargo-sheds. If this method proves safe, practicable, and successful, it will result in material benefit to the orange industry, as it will save two or three handlings of the fruit.