

Poisoning with phosphorized pollard is still recognized to be the cheapest, quickest, and most effective means of coping with the pest. Fumigating with carbon bisulphide is now becoming prohibitive to undertake, owing to the short supplies of this article and the consequent high prices ruling. Much useful and permanent work can be done by erecting netting-fences, destroying burrows, and clearing scrub and cover generally. The sale of phosphorized pollard from the departmental depots has been greatly in excess of that of the previous year.

Noxious Weeds.

Here again the shortage of labour has to some extent prevented the best of work being done in clearing noxious weeds. General weather-conditions have been very favourable for the growth of weeds, and in most cases they thrived and matured early.

Fields Supervisor Ross reports that a surprising amount of good work, which adverse critics do not recognize, has been done in his district. There has been a great gain in settled areas, and much has been done to keep virgin country clean. The Wairoa County is, however, in a bad condition, and must remain so until an officer who has not also to carry out the duties of Inspector of Stock is appointed.

In Supervisor Deem's district the majority of settlers continue to do good work in the destruction of blackberry by means of ploughing. Angora goats are also to some extent instrumental in controlling this weed. Californian thistle is fairly well controlled on agricultural land, but on pastoral lands, where it has a very strong hold, little or nothing has been done with it. Rust (*Puccinia suaveolens*) is doing a lot in many parts of this district in the control of this weed. Ox-eye daisy is increasing on dairy lands, especially where the pasture is running out.

In the South Island Californian thistle is becoming more prevalent. Ragwort, too, unfortunately requires a good deal of labour where cutting is resorted to, and owing to the favourable climatic conditions in the South this season it made rapid growth after the first cutting, and required further attention. Sweetbrier, gorse, and broom have not received a great deal of attention owing to the shortage of labour, and more latitude had to be allowed in consequence.

Several alleged "weed-destroyers" have been given trials during the year, but none of these have done all that was claimed for them.

NEW ZEALAND HEMP.

The report furnished by the Chief Hemp Grader (Mr. W. H. Ferris) on the work of his branch of the Division during the year is attached, as follows:—

The hemp industry during the year ended 31st March, 1916, must be regarded as most satisfactory not only as far as the output was concerned, but also for the highly remunerative prices obtained by the millers during the whole of the season.

Prices.—In April, 1915, the price of good-fair grade hemp was quoted at £25, 10s. per ton f.o.b. During May and June the price advanced to £32 per ton, and although in August and September it fell to £26, in October it advanced again to £29 10s., and steadily increased during the months of November, December, January, and February to £39 per ton. In regard to tow, never before in the history of the hemp industry have higher prices been received for this by-product, first grade having ruled approximately at £14, second grade, £13, and third grade at £11 per ton respectively. For stripper-slips the average price quoted was £7 10s. to £8 per ton, which must be considered very satisfactory.

Quality of Hemp.—I regret to have to record that the quality of the fibre produced during the year does not compare favourably with that produced during the previous year. The proportion of fine grade was only 1.01 per cent., as compared with 2.8 per cent. for 1914–15; while good-fair was only 25.36 per cent., as compared with 34.53 per cent. for the previous year. The percentage of good-fair in the Auckland District was only 10 per cent., low-fair, common, rejected, and condemned grades claiming 50 per cent. of the fibre produced there. As usual practically all the fine grade of fibre was produced in the Wellington and Marlborough Districts.

The cause of the drop in the quality of fibre may be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, several large flax areas in the Manawatu were badly affected with the grub pest, millers being thereby prevented from turning out a high grade of fibre. Secondly, high prices ruled for our low grades of fibre, this generally encouraging many millers to accept low-grade contracts, as a greater output can be obtained by them and at a less cost of production.

Quality of Tow.—Although a large number of millers do their utmost in turning out a good quality of tow, it is to be regretted that many millers do not exercise sufficient care in dealing with this by-product. In glancing through the tables attached it can easily be seen that the millers in the Auckland and Southland Districts still continue to supply the greatest portion of third-grade and condemned tow, the percentage of these in the districts named being 73 per cent. and 56 per cent. respectively. Although the percentage of first-grade shows a slight increase over last year, unfortunately third-grade and condemned show an increase of 6 per cent. The cause of the fall in the quality of tow is practically the same as in the case of hemp—namely, high prices ruling for inferior grades; and as long as many millers continue to receive high prices for an inferior article they will continue to turn out the latter without any regard for the benefit of the industry as a whole. It may also be mentioned here that many of these millers only resume operation when prices are exceedingly high, and consequently they are of no real benefit to the industry.

Quality of Stripper-slips.—The quality of this by-product has improved considerably, largely for the reason that manufacturers will not purchase an inferior grade.

Machinery.—Messrs Suttie and Wynyard, who have been experimenting for some time past with an improved automatic scutcher and tow-shaker, have now installed a machine in one of the chief mills at Foxton. So far it is giving every satisfaction, and as the scutching of hemp is one of the miller's chief troubles, it is to be hoped that the machine will be a great success. Several other millers of an inventive turn of mind have also been experimenting for some time past in improving our present strippers, and during the year it is quite likely that some very important improvements may be announced.

Grading Statistics.

The total number of bales of hemp graded throughout the Dominion during the year was 138,275, as compared with 82,989 for the previous year, an increase of 55,286 bales. During the same period 38,889 bales of tow were graded, as compared with 23,374 for the previous year, an increase of 15,515 bales. Of stripper-slips 5,875 bales were dealt with, as compared with 1,482, an increase of 4,393 bales.