

Employment figures show a slight increase in the number of workers engaged in sawmills, and for comparative purposes the following figures are submitted : 1926-27, 7,208 ; 1927-28, 6,405 ; 1928-29, 6,264 ; 1929-30, 6,504.

The increase in output is to a large extent due to the decrease in prices. The import duty on timber was increased on the 18th August, 1930, from 3s. to 7s. 6d. per 100 ft. of baulk timber, dressed timber from 7s. 6d. to 19s., and sawn timber n.e.i. from 5s. to 9s. 6d. Notwithstanding these appreciable increases in tariff protection, the wholesale selling-prices of native timbers declined very considerably during the past two years. Selecting rimu as a representative line, the price of building A, dressing quality, receded from 39s. on the 19th September, 1929, to 30s. in October, 1930, and 25s. on the 16th April, 1931. Building A, ordinary quality, in the same period was reduced from 20s. to 16s. Building A, heart quality, was reduced during the same period from 20s. (September, 1929) to 19s. (October, 1930) and 16s. (April, 1931). The prices of dry dressed flooring in September, 1929, were—heart, 46s. ; O.B., 27s. ; October, 1930—heart, 38s. ; O.B., 25s. ; and 16th April, 1931—heart, 34s. ; O.B., 24s.

The export trade for the year under review showed a substantial reduction of 12,372,250 ft. in quantity and £138,168 in value compared with that of 1929. The relative figures show the position as follows: 1929—Quantity, 39,098,568 ft. ; value, £439,299. 1930—Quantity, 26,726,318 ft. ; value, £301,131.

The decrease in value of the Australian trade is £136,943. The export trade in beech declined by 1 million feet in quantity and £13,739 in value ; kauri, approximately 1 million feet in quantity and £18,671 in value ; white-pine, 1.13 million feet in quantity and £109,002 in value. Rimu, however, showed a slight increase of 394,000 ft. in quantity and £3,807 in value.

The following table shows in thousands of superficial feet the quantities of timber that directly compete with New Zealand native timber :—

—	1927.	1928.	1929.	1930.
	(1,000 ft.)	(1,000 ft.)	(1,000 ft.)	(1,000 ft.)
Cedar .. .. .	2,390	2,066	1,336	637
Oregon .. .. .	17,638	16,713	16,188	12,807
Hemlock .. .. .	2,207	4,903	4,108	6,142
Redwood .. .. .	7,583	7,478	11,678	9,345
Butter-box shooks .. .. .	1,807	2,006	3,147	4,691
Cheese-crate shooks .. .. .	1,433	785	1,373	1,774
Total .. .. .	33,058	33,951	37,830	35,396

The Industries and Commerce Committee of the House, which inquired in 1929 into the difficulties affecting the marketing of fruit-cases made from New Zealand native timbers, recommended that the Department of Industries and Commerce convene a conference of fruitgrowers, sawmillers, and other interested parties to consider what steps could be taken to ensure greater co-operation between the fruitgrowers and the sawmilling industry.

The conference was held on the 23rd May, 1930, and was attended by representatives of fruit-growers, officials of the Fruit-export Control Board, boxmakers, and sawmillers, and also officials of the State Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture and Industries and Commerce. The conference was marked by a distinct desire on the part of the fruitgrowers and Fruit-export Control Board to support any reasonable proposals which had for their object the increased use of fruit-cases made from New Zealand timber. It was, however, pointed out by the fruit-exporting interests that any cases obtained from local sources had to be made from timber absolutely dry.

It is pleasing to report that the bulk of the requirements for the ensuing season will be obtained from local sources. Approximately not more than 200,000 cases will be imported this year as against approximately 1,250,000 last year. In the Nelson district alone an order for 600,000 cases will probably be placed with the local sawmillers, and in the Hastings district the whole requirements of 150,000 cases will be obtained locally. Advice from the Auckland district is to the effect that 120,000 cases will be obtained from mills in that district.

While the Department is of the opinion that to some extent increased interest on account of Customs duty paid on timber shooks (which is retained until the cases containing fruit are exported) and adverse exchange rates have been factors in diverting orders to the local mill, it believes that a genuine desire exists on the part of the fruit-exporters to obtain their requirements from local sources.

A special Timber Committee, composed of representatives of the State Forest Service, Valuation Department, Department of Industries and Commerce, Government Architect, and the Dominion Federated Sawmillers' Association, has been functioning since April, 1927, and one of its principal duties was to formulate the Standard Grading and Classification Rules in respect of the sale of native timbers.

The most important work of the committee this year has been the holding of a conference with representatives of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, New Zealand Federated Builders' and Contractors' Association, New Zealand Timber-merchants' Federation, and Sawmillers' Association. The conference, which was held on the 3rd July, 1930, was the outcome of criticism of the Standard Grading and Classification Rules, and of the additional cost involved in adopting them in actual