

The growing of passion-fruit on a commercial basis has been receiving considerable attention during recent years, more particularly in the North Auckland district. There has, however, been a falling off in the quantity of fruit produced during the past two seasons, due largely to the want of co-operation in the marketing of the produce. Another factor that has contributed to the past season's light crop is the incidence of disease, which demonstrates that it is essential for growers to carry out systematic spraying of the vines, this phase of the work having hitherto been practically neglected.

Although the plantings of new orchards during the year were fairly considerable, these were largely offset by the taking-out of trees on certain areas that had become unprofitable. The total area in commercial orchards in the Dominion, therefore, stands at approximately 27,000 acres.

During the year a Committee was appointed to investigate the marketing of fruit and vegetables in the Dominion. The Committee sat in the main centres and heard the evidence of a large number of fruitgrowers and others. A full report has been placed before the Government, and no doubt the recommendations contained therein when put into operation will assist in removing many anomalies that at present exist.

The cultivation of asparagus on a commercial basis is a matter that has been receiving attention during the year. A trial shipment forwarded recently to London carried reasonably well and realized excellent prices. In view of the considerable demand locally and the possibility of opening up an export trade both in fresh as well as canned asparagus, arrangements have been made to plant an experimental acre of land situated on the Napier lagoon reclamation, where some 6,000 acres of land of very fair quality with good road, railway, and port facilities will shortly be made available for settlement.

A conference of Orchard Instructors attached to the Division was held in Wellington during July, and many important matters connected with the work of the Division were discussed.

EXPORT OF FRUIT.

The inclement weather conditions prevailing practically throughout the Dominion during the 1936 fruit season seriously interfered with the carrying-out of orchard operations, particularly in respect to spraying, and a fairly large proportion of the apple crop was rendered unsuitable for export purposes on account of being affected by black-spot and the effects of russetting.

Considerable losses were also inflicted by the heavy gale which swept the North Island on the 2nd February, some growers losing 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. of their crop.

As a result of these unusual conditions the quantity of fruit suitable for export was considerably reduced.

The total number of cases shipped overseas was 1,228,286. Of these, 914,149 cases apples and 90,635 cases pears were consigned to Great Britain, 61,421 cases apples and 582 cases pears to the Continent, 53,993 cases apples and 2,131 cases pears to North America, 47,966 cases apples and 19,618 cases pears to Sweden, 30,000 cases apples to South America, and 7,791 cases apples to the East.

In connection with the 1936 fruit shipments, where a grower's average return is below the average rate determined by the New Zealand Fruit-export Control Board, the Government agreed to pay to the Board's central fund 50 per cent. of the shortages provided the agreed-upon rate did not exceed 9s. New Zealand currency per case c.i.f. overseas destinations and provided the fruit has been exported in accordance with Government export requirements. The liability of the Government under this arrangement not to exceed £12,500.

Various factors were responsible for the low prices received for the fruit shipped to Great Britain during the 1936 season.

Continuous cold weather experienced till well into June and the curtailing of all entertainments on account of the death of His Majesty King George V had a depressing effect on trade.

New Zealand fruit had also to compete with heavy shipments from other countries, exports of apples from Canada and the United States to the United Kingdom being nearly 50 per cent. greater than those of the previous season. Imports from South Africa and Australia were also considerably in excess of those of 1935. Very little business resulted on the Continental markets owing to the unsettled state of affairs in Europe.

The returns from other countries to which shipments were made were considered satisfactory.

Exports of apples and pears from the Dominion during the last five years are as follows:—1932, 1,596,058 cases; 1933, 1,430,513 cases; 1934, 1,574,912 cases; 1935, 1,063,420 cases; 1936, 1,228,286 cases.

The destruction of practically the whole of the fruit crop by a heavy frost in Hawke's Bay, one of the principal exporting districts, will seriously affect the quantity of fruit available for export during the 1937 season, and it is doubtful if the total shipments will reach a million cases.

In connection with the 1937 fruit shipments, the Government has guaranteed to the grower a c.i.f. return of 10s. 6d. per case (New Zealand currency) in respect of such varieties of apples and pears packed in accordance with the requirements of the export regulations for shipment to duly approved markets.

The first of this season's shipments left Wellington per s.s. "Fordsdale" on 18th February and comprised 10,538 cases apples and 28 cases pears.

LOCAL MARKETS FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.

The inspection of locally-grown fruit and vegetables in shops and auction-rooms in the main marketing centres received regular attention during the year.

Reports to hand indicate that the bulk of the lines offered for sale was up to standard and well packed.