

LINEN FLAX

During the past year there has been a decline in production, due partly to the closing of the Seddon and Leeston factories and partly to the shortage of crop at a number of centres, necessitating a curtailment of operations.

Production figures, compared with the previous year, are as follows :—

	Fibre. Tons.	Tow. Tons.	Seed. Tons.
1943-44	1,899	1,103	3,964
1944-45	1,431	759	2,534

The total value of products, compared with the previous year, are as follows :—

	Fibre. £	Tow. £	Seed. £	Other Products. £
1943-44	447,194	75,537	84,969	18,721
1944-45	354,609	55,741	49,206	16,901

The labour complement on 31st March, 1944, comprised 723 males and 207 female workers, or a total of 930. By 31st March, 1945, this had been reduced to 517 males and 102 females, or a total of 619.

In the 1943-44 season an area of 9,854 acres of flax was sown, of which 6,857 acres were accepted for fibre, yielding 11,259 tons of crop and purchased at a cost of £82,687. In the previous season, 1942-43, from an area of 21,849 acres, 17,487 acres were accepted and yielded 33,500 tons of crop. A substantial portion of this crop was, however, carried over for processing in the factory year of 1944-45.

In the 1944-45 season an area of 12,599 acres was sown, of which an area of 8,417 acres was harvested for fibre. This crop is expected to yield 17,182 tons of straw. The season promised to be one of the most favourable yet experienced, but hail prior to harvest and heavy rain and floods during harvest ruined much of the crop in Canterbury. In the Washdyke and Makikihi districts less than one-half of the crop was saved. On the other hand, favourable conditions were experienced in Otago and Southland, with the exception of Tapanui, and some excellent crops have been harvested in the Winton and Otautau districts.

Production figures for the year 1945-46 are expected to be—

	Tons.
Fibre	1,223
Tow	606
Seed	1,826

The arrangement with the British Government for the growing of linen flax terminates on 30th November, 1945, but all linen flax produced up to 30th November, 1946, will be accepted by the British Ministry of Supply. It is anticipated that by the end of this period the industry in New Zealand will have produced in linen flax and tow fibre 10,301 tons, to a value of £1,808,787.

The production of seed in the same period will amount to 15,472 tons, to a value of £357,988. Altogether, since the industry commenced, the value of all production will reach £2,230,923.

It is proposed to carry on seven factories for the production of fibre and tow to supply the linen flax spinning and weaving industries in New Zealand and retain in employment approximately 400 workers.

TOBACCO INDUSTRY

The supply of seasonal labour has again proved inadequate and has tended to prevent an increase in production to the extent that was desired. The provision of labour made possible the harvesting of most of the marketable leaf, but female labour for tying purposes was in very short supply. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties and the toll of leaf taken by frost, hail, drought, and flood, the quantity of marketable leaf was very little below the record-breaking total of 1942-43.

Climatic conditions during the season under review were not the most favourable for the tobacco crop. Heavy rain during September and October made the land wet and cold and delayed spring cultivation considerably. Fine conditions generally prevailed through the planting period, but a hot dry spell of seven weeks during December and January adversely affected the crop. Irrigation plants were in much demand during this period and those growers who had these facilities were in a fortunate position. Heavy rains during February and March caused some flooding, and in low-lying areas leaf was lost from this cause. A frost on 27th March, 1944, caught some of the late leaf in scattered localities.

There is a trend towards introducing labour-saving devices wherever possible. Several new planting-machines were in use last season and were reported on favourably. A new type of fertilizer drill was also in use.

In connection with the Government's scheme for the provision of temporary accommodation for rural workers, a number of applications were sponsored by the Board on behalf of the growers.

The Tobacco Board has continued to make grants toward the cost of a programme of research work carried out at the Tobacco Research Station, and during the year under review it contributed £533 for this purpose. A total of more than £6,000 has now been contributed by the Board since the establishment of the Station.

A notable achievement during the year has been the establishment of a fund for the purpose of compensating tobacco-growers who sustained losses of leaf by the incidence of frost, hail, and flood. The fund is guaranteed by the Government, and will be administered by the Tobacco Board under regulations that have been brought down for the purpose.

As mentioned in the previous annual report, prices of tobacco leaf for the 1944 harvest were 1s. 11½d. per pound for flue-cured and 1s. 8½d. per pound for air-dried leaf, and were fixed by the issue of a Price Order by the Price Tribunal.