

Approximately 800 fruit-trees were distributed last year, and 1,300, including about 400 citrus, will be sent out during 1946.

The assured disposal, at satisfactory rates, of market-garden produce during the war years has encouraged various Maoris to contemplate entering into commercial production. Much waste land or partially used land in the proximity of Maori settlements could be converted to profitable use by this means, and it is hoped that the example set by some of the more progressive will be an incentive to greater effort by others.

Individual marketing and inability to follow market trends owing to comparative isolation facilitates exploitation by astute buyers and has been the cause of much disappointment and loss to growers. The Department, in acting as agent for the growers and providing instruction and assistance in growing and marketing produce, is performing a valuable service at no cost to the grower. During 1945 produce to the value of approximately £9,000, made up of 335½ tons of maize, 132 tons of potatoes, 90 tons of onions, and 50½ tons of kumaras, was marketed on behalf of growers from a comparatively small area in Tauranga alone, in addition to kumaras, potatoes, and onions from Gisborne and other districts. As the bulk of this produce is new production and an extra effort by the producers, it can be accepted as an indication of the latent possibilities in this direction, and suggests that under sympathetic guidance the Maori can become a significant force in the national economy. Distance from the markets and the consequential heavy cost of transport are effective barriers to the progress of many localities, and ways and means are being explored to overcome these handicaps.

The opening of vegetable-processing works in Wairoa has filled a long-felt want in providing a means whereby small holders can profitably use areas too small for other farming activities by producing crops for which a market is assured. Approximately 87,000 tomato plants were grown by twenty-eight Maori families in Wairoa and the surrounding districts, and almost without exception the returns, notwithstanding the dry season, have been highly satisfactory. The Native Department service of instruction and advice to these people, who were inexperienced in tomato culture, can justly claim credit for the introduction of a very promising industry. Asparagus culture has been commenced, and extension into other lines is anticipated. Similar service is available as required and is being used to the limit of staff ability to cope with positions as they arise. Recognizing the limitations and the handicaps under which many of the Maori people are labouring, the scope of departmental activities is being enlarged to provide the specialized instruction necessary to enable the Maori to compete on an equal footing with his pakeha neighbours.

During the year experimental plots of sunflower seeds suitable for oil processing were planted at Huramua (Wairoa), Tauranga, and Whirinaki. Oil-cake made from sunflower seed contains over 36 per cent. albuminous substance and up to 10 per cent. fat and is therefore a valuable concentrated cattle-food. The remaining part of the flower after threshing can be used as a coarse fodder. The husk of the sunflower may be used for fuel and is the material for obtaining furfural (a volatile oil), while ashes of the stalks and flowers contain up to 30 per cent. potassium carbonate and may be used for the production of potash required in the textile and soap-boiling industries. After inquiries were made in Russia and Canada, a small consignment was received as a gift from the Dominion of Canada, but owing to the extremely dry conditions prevailing and the lateness of the season when the seed arrived only a small quantity was used this year (it was, in fact, sown for seed to increase the quantity available next year), and larger areas will be sown next spring. The sowings, considering the late planting and drought conditions, were successful.