

PHORMIUM TENAX

With the payment of the guaranteed price, greater interest has been taken in this industry by millers and others. However, production is well below the requirements of end users of hard fibres, but fibre-production is increasing steadily. Labour is still one of the major problems to be dealt with, and mills are being handicapped by shortage of skilled operators and cutters for green leaf. Another factor arising from shortage of labour is that swamp maintenance is well behind, and this will seriously affect the green-leaf supply unless the drains can be attended to and space filling carried out in the plantations.

The end users of fibre are working from hand to mouth, and had it not been for the import of sisal to help the manufacture of baling-twine and binder twine the position would have been desperate for the harvest requirements. The prospects for the coming season are not good, as a greater quantity of these twines will be required because of the world shortage of wire. Every effort is being made to encourage millers to further production.

Financial Aid to Growers.—Government aid to millers and growers has been made available and up to date one proposition has been dealt with. This is the purchase of about 600 acres of land near Invercargill, and the total amount involved is about £27,000.

End Users' Requirements.—Increasing use of phormium fibres, &c., is being made by fibrous plasterers and upholsterers. In nearly every town, large and small, factories making fibrous-plaster sheets are in evidence, and it is estimated that some 700 tons of fibre, &c., is used annually for this purpose alone.

The position with regard to binder twine and, particularly, baling-twine became serious because of the non-delivery of baling-wire, and every effort was put forward to supply the harvesting-machines with the necessary twines, which was eventually accomplished.

The present machinery installed by end users is capable of absorbing 7,000 tons to 8,000 tons of fibre and tow, and the Department's target is 10,000 tons of fibre, tow, and stripper slips a year.

Production of Fibre.—The total amount of fibre, tow, stripper slips, and unscutched fibre (straw) produced for the year ended 31st January, 1948, was 4,643 tons, made up as follows:—

	Tons.
Fibre	1,540
Tow	312½
Straw (unscutched fibre)	2,581
Stripper slips	209½
	4,643

This is an increase of 1,471 tons over the previous year's production.

FLOCK HOUSE FARM OF INSTRUCTION

The standard of training at Flock House was considerably widened during the year, and the course of instruction includes lectures, demonstrations, and visits to stud farms and other centres of agricultural interest in the district. The number of applicants has been considerable and there is now a waiting-list of youths desiring to take the course. The average number of boys in training during the year was 28, and it is planned to increase the number to 45 during the coming year.

On the farm, conditions were very dry during summer and pastures suffered, as on all farms in the district. The usual programme of crop-production was maintained.