

SUGAR-BEET PRODUCTION.

The trials in the growing of sugar-beet at the Ashburton Experimental Farm, the Central Development Farm (Weraroa), the Marton Experimental Area, and the subsidized farms at Manaia and Stratford have created a great deal of interest in the question as to whether a beet-sugar industry could not be profitably developed in the Dominion. The high yields secured, varying from 18 to 24 tons per acre even under not particularly favourable conditions, and the satisfactory sugar content indicate that so far as the actual growing of the roots is concerned the crop presents no more difficulties than does the ordinary mangold. The especially satisfactory results secured at the Ashburton Farm were largely responsible for the efforts that have been made by private enterprise in Canterbury to establish a sugar-beet growing and manufacturing company. So far, however, nothing tangible has resulted, mainly through lack of adequate financial support.

The question as to whether development in this direction should be encouraged is one that will have to be decided one way or the other, and in order to secure some information regarding sugar-beet growing under ordinary field conditions the Department has distributed a considerable amount of beet-seed to farmers in both Canterbury and Otago. Judging by the number of requests made for trials with this seed it appears as if the Canterbury farmer, in particular, would be quite prepared to undertake the production of this crop on commercial lines. When in Victoria, in August, I spent some time in the Maffra district, where the only beet-sugar factory in Australia is located, and made a general investigation of the industry as carried on there. On my return I submitted a report, the main features of which are included in an article in the last January issue of the *Journal*. Since my return I have been much impressed with the great suitability of many parts of Canterbury for the growing of sugar-beet, and if the industry is ever attempted to be developed the initial efforts should be undertaken in that province.

One point with regard to beet-sugar production has not previously been sufficiently stressed, and that is the large amount of labour that would be absorbed in the manufacturing end of the business from, say, the end of May to the end of September. This would fit in remarkably well with the slack period of our meat-works, and beet-sugar factories located in the vicinity of meat-works would be of mutual benefit so far as the labour question is concerned.

LECTURES.

During the year a large number of lectures to farmers have been given by myself and members of my staff, mainly under the auspices of the Farmers' Union and of fruitgrowers' associations. These lectures are illustrated with lantern-slides, and the generally large attendances clearly indicate the favour with which this class of extension work is viewed by the farming community. Requests for lectures and lecture tours have, however, become so numerous that it has been found possible to deal with only a small proportion of them.

HEMP-GRADING SERVICE.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF HEMP-GRADER.

The Director-General.

Wellington, 10th May, 1921.

HEREWITH please find my annual report for the year ended 31st March, 1921.

W. H. FERRIS, Chief Hemp-grader.

VOLUME OF PRODUCTION.

The quantities of hemp and tow received at the grading-stores of the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1921, show a decrease of 8,032 bales as compared with the previous year's figures. This decrease is accounted for by the continuous floods in the spring, rendering many of the mills unable to work owing to the flooded state of their swamps; a considerable drop in the price of hemp accompanied by high cost of production; the strike of employees in the Foxton district at the latter end of the season; and the loss by fire of a two-stripper mill at Makerua, one stripper at Invercargill, and one at Westport. The decrease at the various grading-ports was as follows: Wellington 1,118 bales, Auckland 4,080 bales, Foxton 1,838 bales, and Bluff 996 bales.

PRICES.

The average f.o.b. prices per ton obtained for phormium-fibre for the past year are as follows: Hemp—Good-fair £32, high-fair £30, low-fair £27, common £24. Tow—First grade £14, second grade £13, third grade £11. Compared with the previous year these prices show a decrease of £1 10s. on both good-fair and high-fair, while the price of tow has increased in all grades by £6 per ton.

QUALITY OF FIBRE.

As can be seen from the attached tables the quality of the hemp during the past year (except that from the Marlborough, Wairoa, and Southland districts) cannot be regarded as satisfactory, low-fair and common grades comprising 26 per cent. of the total gradings at the three chief ports—Wellington, Foxton, and Auckland. The production of so much high-fair and low-fair grades at those ports may be attributed to the small difference in the prices of good-fair (which should be our standard grade) and low-fair. At one period during the season the difference between the London