

The absence of refrigerated shipping-space obliges growers to cut bananas before they have attained full maturity, in order to prevent their arrival on the New Zealand markets in a ripe condition. This has brought about an unfavourable comparison between the Cook Islands bananas and the bananas imported per the N.Z.G.M.V. "Maui Pomare" from Niue and Samoa, but the advent of the new Union Steamship Co.'s T.S.M.V. "Matua" should, in the belief of the Delegation, greatly improve the banana trade of the Cook Islands.

Evidence was given at the parliamentary inquiry in Wellington that the Cook Islands were incapable of producing bananas of size, shape, and flavour comparable to the Niue and Samoan bananas. The Delegation has inspected thousands of banana plants and many thousands of bananas, and this inspection convinces members that Rarotonga can produce bananas that compare in every way with similar fruit produced elsewhere.

TOMATO INDUSTRY.

Tomato-growing, introduced into Rarotonga many years ago, has become an increasingly important industry. Last year the exports to New Zealand numbered 62,311 boxes, valued for local Customs purposes at £10,673.

This crop is of particular value, as it is a comparatively quick-growing one, and has time and again proved a boon to the people when the main banana and orange crops have been lost through storm and hurricane damage, in providing them with a certain amount of income pending the recovery of banana and orange plantations.

A misconception which is held in New Zealand, that Rarotongan tomato-growers do not require to cultivate their crops as do New Zealand growers, was speedily dispelled when the plantations were inspected. The tomato-grower in Rarotonga has to go through the same operations as does the grower in New Zealand. He grows from seed, and plants out the seedlings after the land is prepared. His fight against weeds and pests in the tropical climate is more intense, and through infrequent shipping opportunities a large proportion of the crop is not marketed.

Growers are gradually improving the varieties under cultivation with a view to improving colour and form to meet market requirements. Tomato-growing on the whole does not present the same difficulties which confront the successful growing of citrus fruits and bananas.

COPRA INDUSTRY.

Coconut-growing for the production of copra has been an industry of the first importance in the Cook Islands, but owing to the low price ruling in the world markets of recent years exports have heavily declined.

Present prices, however, show an upward tendency, and should this continue this should once more become an important industry.

PART VII.—COMMERCIAL.

AVERAGE PRICES.

Prices received by the growers over a period of years have varied greatly. Oranges and bananas have sold in the Islands at from 1s. 6d. a case to 7s. 6d. a case, and tomatoes at from 9d. to 6s. 6d. a case, according to the quantities being shipped and the New Zealand market demands.

The average prices received by the growers for fruit alone, over the past four years (taken from official figures), have been—

	Per Case.	
	s.	d.
Bananas	2	11
Oranges	2	6
Tomatoes	3	2

Generally, the prices have not been profitable to growers.

METHODS OF SALE.

New Zealand fruit-merchants instruct their Rarotongan agents or branches as to the prices they are prepared to offer for each shipment of fruit. The Rarotongan firms collaborate and compare quotations, and then endeavour to persuade their New Zealand principals to agree to a common price. The prices eventually agreed to become the standard prices which are adhered to by all the buyers.

Native and European growers are free to ship their own fruit to New Zealand merchants to sell on a commission basis. On account, however, of many unsatisfactory experiences when growers' account sales have been debits instead of credits, due to heavy deterioration in transit, shipping-space allocation, and other causes beyond the control of the grower, most growers prefer to accept the prices offered by merchants for delivery either into packing-sheds or on wharf at Rarotonga.

CHARGES ON ORANGES.

The charges comprising freights, cases, wharfage, commissions, inspection fees, &c., cannot be stated in terms of flat charges per case, as some commissions are charged per case, while auctioneers' commissions are charged as a percentage of total selling-price, and Rarotongan traders' commissions on sales returns are charged as a percentage of gross Rarotongan proceeds of sales. Taking an actual