

an acre to the grower—a splendid return from land which was previously in poor pasture supporting few stock.

Production-costs are comparatively heavy because of the amount of labour involved in cultivating the crop and the quality of fertilizer used. But Motueka growers would be the first to admit that the development of the tobacco industry in their district has been a considerable financial boon to them.

Raising the Plants

The tobacco-seed is planted in hot-houses during August. By October it is ready for replanting to the seedling beds, and by November is strong enough for the open fields. All the seed necessary is grown in the district, but the farmers rarely grow plants from seed themselves. They prefer to buy the seedlings from local nurseries at the not exorbitant price of 4s. per box of 1,500.

In the tobacco fields shallow furrows are ploughed about 3 ft. 6 in. apart and into these furrows fertilizer is drilled. The furrow is then closed and the seedlings planted by hand about 2 ft.

apart. An average of 8 cwt. of fertilizer per acre is used, half being drilled in at the time of planting and half scattered by hand during the growth of the plant.

The hardest work is cultivating the growing crop. It must be inter-cultivated three to five times before harvest and hand-hoed three times. Average rainfall is necessary up to the end of January, but the plant will not flourish in damp ground. It grows as a long stalk, commences to flower when about 4 ft. 6 in. high, and is between 5 ft. and 7 ft. high in February, when picking is commenced. Not exactly slow growth—7 ft. in less than four months!

The Harvest

At harvest time the leaves are picked from the bottom of the stalk first and only two or three of the ripest leaves are taken from each plant at a time. The pickers take only the yellowing leaves and, as each plant has twelve to fourteen leaves and the ripening process is a gradual one, the picking of the leaf goes on until mid-April.



The kilns of the Tobacco Research Station, Riwaka, with tobacco growing in the foreground. On the left is a plant approaching maturity.