

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, PAPUA, FOR THE YEAR 1939-40.

During the six months preceding June, 1939, the local selling price of copra rose to a value not unremunerative to the producer which led coco-nut planters to believe that the year 1939-40 might possibly be a good one. In the first half of the year, this view was further strengthened by the fact that overseas vessels called in July, November and December and lifted all the produce on hand for which the producers received a fairly satisfactory price, particularly for hot-air grade which in November and December realized £10 3s. 3d. per ton net, the gross figure being £12 7s. 6d. (London market price).

During the latter half of the year, however, and up to the time of writing, no copra carrying vessels have called and there is now little or no space for storing copra at either Port Moresby or Samarai with the result that at the moment, the product is unsaleable and the industry in a precarious position. In fact, the situation is so grave that the Commonwealth Government has intimated that some measure of assistance to planters is being considered but no indication has yet been received as to the form it will take, although it is confidently assumed that it will be sufficient to relieve the anxiety of growers, particularly those who rely on this product only.

The comparatively high market price for rubber ruling during the year stimulated planters to take up further land in new parts of the Territory suitable for its cultivation.

During the month of May, 1940, an opportunity was taken to canvass planters for the purpose of ascertaining the position of the rubber industry in the Territory, details of which are as follows:—

Number of producing plantations .. .. .	23
Area under cultivation .. .. .	14,494 acres
Area planted with rubber .. .. .	12,964 „
Area being tapped .. .. .	7,904 „

The annual production of the tappable area is estimated at 3,009,379 lb.

Taking the above figures as a guide the average yield per acre is 380 lb. but this figure is rather misleading as some plantations produce as much as 500 to 520 lb. per acre, whilst in an isolated instance the yield is given at 1,428 lb. This latter yield may appear somewhat fantastic although it is true and the explanation is that the trees on this particular area are very old and have not been tapped for many years.

At the close of the year the market price (Australian Currency) for the various grades of rubber was as follows:—

No. 1 Smoked Sheet .. .. .	14.035d. per lb.
„ 2 „ „ .. .. .	13.248d. „ „
Clippings .. .. .	13.248d. „ „
Scrap .. .. .	10.666d. „ „

The cost of production and marketing, including interest on capital invested is estimated at 7.5d. per lb.

It is pleasing to note that a number of areas have been taken up in the Port Moresby District for market gardening, both for private use and commercial purposes. The Territory and more particularly Port Moresby has long felt the want of a plentiful supply of fresh fruit and vegetables and there seems to be no reason why the same cannot be successfully grown in the Laloki River District, which is close to the township, and marketed at a profit to the grower.

Agricultural exports for the year were as follows:—

Mangrove Bark	..	..	..	..	..	268½ tons
Desiccated Coco-nut	..	..	..	..	..	1875½ "
Coffee Beans	..	..	..	..	..	77½ "
Copra	..	..	..	..	..	6656½ "
Gum	..	..	..	..	..	62 "
Rubber	..	..	..	..	..	1345½ "
Grain	..	..	..	..	..	196½ Bushels
Timber	..	..	..	..	..	67,299 super-feet

### REVIEW.

A report, "Manurial Experiments on Cocoa in Trinidad and Tobago", by F. J. Pound, Ph.D., B.Sc., Department of Agriculture, Trinidad and Tobago, has just come to hand. The report, comprising 102 pages presents results of fertilizer trials on various cocoa soils in Trinidad and Tobago. As some of these soils correspond roughly to soil types found in New Guinea, much of the information contained in this report is of interest to cocoa planters here. In the "Summary and Recommendations for Manuring existing Cocoa" it is stated—

It has been emphasised here again that fertilising must be looked upon as an operation like pruning and draining, which may not pay off the capital expense involved in the year during which the work is done, but in which the good effects are seen long after. It is probable that, like pruning and draining, efficiency can be obtained by a small annual upkeep once the initial capital expense has been incurred.

The problem at the present time is twofold: manuring to increase yields from the existing tree population, and secondly the building up of soil fertility of suitable areas in readiness for a more efficient population to come.

Upon application, interested planters will be forwarded extracts of this report if the type of soil upon which they are growing cocoa, has been dealt with therein.—*Ed.*

In a recent bulletin (*Planters' Bulletin*, No. 9, 1940), issued by the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya, information is given on the manuring of rubber trees.

Striking increases in growth and yield were obtained by the regular application of a complete manure to rubber trees of the Dunlop Malayan Estates Ltd., when they were brought into tapping ten years ago, being then seven years old. The increased yield over comparable unmanured trees was 30 per cent. or 200 lb. per acre.

The question of whether nitrogen alone would produce adequate results is still unsettled, and for the moment the inclusion of phosphate and a little potash is recommended by the Rubber Research Institute.