

1923

KENYA

43682

REC'D
RE. 3 SEP 23

DATE

9th Aug, 1923

CIRCULATION :-

*Collett
Parkinson*

SUBJECT

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Previous [unclear]

20666

MINUTES

See also 21453/23 Kenya

Have you any other files on

108

17, 21

It is satisfactory that they have realized their mistake in giving up grading. Apparently the Govt. is now doing it again, but at a much smaller cost than they formerly undertook as necessary 48149/22. This is a useful report & gives a better idea of the position & prospects of flax in Kenya than anything I have seen or heard before. I think it should be sufficient simply

Subsequent Paper

W/ 43554/23

MINUTES

MINUTES NOT TO BE WRITTEN
ON THIS SIDE

to send copy to the Floor
Committee for info.

JH
5.9.73

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MINUTES

MINUTES NOT TO BE WRITTEN
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to send copy to the Flax
Committee for info.

JH
5.8.23

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The record
of the
Flax
Committee

KENYA

No. 1840.



GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
NAIROBI,
KENYA.

43682
FILED
RE 3 SEP 23

26th August, 1923.

My Lord Duke,

M.G.
13102

With reference to Your Grace's despatch No. 447 of the 26th March, 1923, on the subject of flax-growing in Kenya, I have the honour to transmit a report on the Flax Industry prepared by the Director of Agriculture.

REPSI

2. It is observed from Your Grace's correspondence with the Chairman of the Empire Flax Growing Committee that the suggestion of financial assistance to flax growers from this Colony's funds was not entertained.

3. The industry is not in a prosperous condition but as far as is possible assistance is rendered to growers by the Agricultural Department and it will be noted that the Flax Officer is again undertaking the work of grading.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord Duke,

Your Grace's most devoted
and most obedient servant,

ACTING GOVERNOR.

THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, K.G., F.C., G.C.M.G., G.S.V.O.,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES,
DOWNING STREET,
LONDON, S. W.

REPORT UPON FLAX INDUSTRY IN

INDIA

DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE. (Gen. Mr. Alex Holm).

June, 1923.

Statistical:-

From the Agricultural Census Reports the following figures are furnished:-

(Statistical statement attached).

The increase in sorage in 1921 (as at June 30th) was the result of development undertaken and crops sown before the market slumped in the latter half of that year. The yields are low but it should be noted that losses from any cause whatever, e.g. drought in certain areas, caterpillars etc., are accounted for. On a number of holdings the crop though reaped was never retted and scutched and the failure to produce flax and tow has reduced the average yield for the country appreciably. That of linseed is also low and does not represent the actual yield of crops, the seed of which is removed from the straw. Not infrequently the seed is not recovered.

The development of an export trade in Linseed is of recent origin, and in order to foster it the Railway reduced the freight rate on it, as in the case of other "oil seeds".

The high proportion of tow to flax may be noted. The causes are probably the unsuitability of certain areas for

producing good quality fibre, together with difficulties in carrying out retting satisfactorily, and generally the want of experience of many growers in handling the crop coupled with a paucity of knowledge of the best methods to be adopted.

Based upon the following values at Kenya stations, viz., Flax £60 per ton, Tow £20 per ton and Linseed £10 per ton, it is seen that the actual production for the year July 1st, 1921 to June 30th, 1922, amounted to £100,470 in the Colony.

General position.

When the industry was being established in 1919 and 1920 heavy expenditure was incurred on plant and machinery, seed and erection of mills at a time when costs were abnormally high. Overhead charges were further inflated by the change in currency.

These costs of development were chiefly incurred during the period when flax was selling at phenomenally high prices, but before the crops had been grown and were ready for marketing the trade had slumped to such a degree that towards the end of 1921 flax was almost unsaleable at any price.

During the period of high prices flax was sown and mills were erected in areas which, particularly in the light of later experience, were, chiefly on account of climatic conditions, unsuited to the crop. The failure of crops in these areas has contributed towards confidence in the industry being shaken, but there is evidence to show that in the higher colder and wetter parts of the Colony flax is grown successfully, the quality of the fibre is higher and the yield satisfactory.

Retting. Originally water retting was practised and

fairly satisfactory results appear to have been obtained, but later with a succession of two or three years of lower rainfall it is possible that the character of the water in the streams changed materially. In any case the quality of water retted flax was unsatisfactory, and dew retting was recommended. Practical difficulties are however experienced in adopting that method in the handling of the crop from an extensive area, as the period during which it can be carried out is restricted, and there is uncertainty as to completion of the retting process.

Experiments recently undertaken by a prominent grower, with Departmental assistance, in which the water in the retting tanks is slightly heated, have given promising results with an increase in the proportion of fibre to tow.

Growers are beginning to realise that flax production is not a simple matter, that the approved practise of other countries is not necessarily applicable to Kenya, and that there remains much to be learnt in ^{order} obtain to obtain satisfactory results and to meet the needs of the flax market.

Grading. Reports from the trade show that a marked improvement in the quality of the flax has been made. That has been due to increased experience of growers in the handling of the crop and in no small measure to the introduction of grading, and the advisory services rendered by the Flax Officers of this Department. One of the chief objects of the Flax Growers Association was the introduction of a system of grading and after much consideration that was undertaken under the control of this Department. It was clearly intended that when it had been in operation for a period, during

which experience would be gained as to the suitability of the grades and the methods, favourable consideration would be given to grading being made compulsory under the "Agricultural Products Export Ordinance of 1921". Almost immediately after grading was initiated - June 1921 - the flax market slumped heavily. One result was that under this optional scheme a number of growers were naturally not disposed to incur an expenditure of £3 per ton on grading flax and ~~£2~~ ^{£2.00} per ton on to the Department undertook to refund an amount of the cost proved to be less, but on the basis that half the cost of the services of the flax officers was not to be charged against grading, as shown by Government in consideration of their advisory and experimental work, the cost approximated very closely to these charges.

In effecting a reduction of expenditure the official flax grading scheme and the costs of the flax officers, who were also graders, were abolished. At a meeting of flax growers a majority vote decided against compulsory grading and a scheme was formulated whereby licensed graders, who would charge and take fees for their services, were to be appointed. The value of a Government grade mark was beginning to be realised on the market, and it is feared that the effect of the alteration was not fully appreciated. At meetings of the Empire Flax Growing Committee held in London in August 1922 and of flax spinners and merchants held in Belfast shortly afterwards the following resolution was passed:-

"This meeting expresses the strongest possible view against the abolition of the grading of flax and forms a resolution to be sent to the authorities in Kenya urging that this retrograde step should be reversed and that the grading

should be continued as before".

There is evidence to show that the official grading scheme was sound and was proving to be of great value to the industry. Subsequent experience has shown that the scheme of "licensed graders" is not satisfactory. In order to encourage grading and to remove any complaints as to fees charged they were reduced. One grader was wholly unable to earn a livelihood, that of the other was somewhat precarious and his continuation of the duties is doubtful, while the Flax Control Board established under the new scheme has failed to function, and such control as has been exercised has been done Departmentally.

Prior to grading being introduced, consignments and even individual bales, varied in type and quality to so great an extent that some spinners declined to handle Kenya flax. This was seen in the course of an enquiry in Belfast when it was revealed that spinners there had lost interest in the trade with Kenya. It is considered that the only satisfactory method to be adopted is to restore the official grading scheme and apply it under the Grading Ordinance assuming that the output warrants it. In that way the interests of the country and of individual growers will be protected and fostered and no costs will have to be borne by the taxpayer.

In order to assist the industry not to disturb continuity of methods and to secure uniformity in grading the Flax Officer of the Department of Agriculture is again undertaking the grading in the absence of the two "Licensed graders" appointed under the new scheme. The value of the use of the Official K brand has meanwhile been lost, but in view of the uncertainty which obtains in regard to future arrangements for

grading it does not appear advisable to revert to the original K brand at present and the "L.G." brand is being used.

Marketing.

The introduction of grading improved the position of growers in so far as it enabled them to secure reasonable advances against shipment, and markets have steadied to the extent that flax of good quality is available at prices, which though low, show a fair working profit on farms suited to flax growing and under good management. Some growers complain of the low prices realized and of the delay which occurs in effecting sales and the expenses which follow, but information leads one to believe that in these cases the flax is of very inferior quality, that offers for it are difficult to obtain, and that it can only be placed at a low price.

Diseases and Pests.

Those which affect the crop to any appreciable degree are "wilt" and "Caterpillar". "Wilt" is spreading as might be expected according as the crop is grown for a long period on the same farm, but there is no reason to suppose that with the application of good cultural methods it cannot be controlled.

"Caterpillar" has caused serious destruction to crops over extensive areas and has discouraged several growers. Hitherto it has been confined to the less suitable districts i. e., those at lower altitudes where the climate is ~~warmer~~ hotter and drier than in the best flax areas, but quite recently the pest has spread to a higher region. The Department of Agriculture has carried out extensive experiments designed to find practicable means for its eradication. The "Caterpillar" appliance is successful

in minimising the damage. Spraying experiments with different ingredients were conducted. No liquid spray had any appreciable effect on the caterpillars, but it has been demonstrated that a dust spray consisting of 1 part Paris Green and 4 parts of Lime will kill 80 to 90 per cent of the caterpillars after one application. That method has however not yet been adopted in practice. The cost amounts to about 9/- per acre and a small power spraying plant is required. The financial position of growers has been such that they have not been disposed to incur the necessary expenditure in last year in carrying a stock of caterpillars.

Departmental work. The number of flax officers was increased to three at the time when the industry was making rapid strides. In addition to rendering advisory services and carrying out experimental work they undertook the grading under the official scheme. In 1922 two of these officers were retrenched but they became "licensed graders" under the new scheme. They have now however left the country, and I understand that they are not likely to return. The Flax Officer remains and he is at present engaged on carrying out co-operative experiments on farms, giving advice to growers by visits to farms and by correspondence, and in the absence of licensed graders he is also grading flax on application.

On the Kabete Experiment Farm ~~experiments~~ experiments valuable to the ~~flax~~ industry were conducted, (a) on testing different varieties and "strains" of flax, and determining with accuracy their comparative yield, quality and value of flax, tow and linseed; (b) rate of seed to be sown; (c) different methods of retting; (d) issue of pure seed and seed of improved strains for experimental and other purposes.

With the closing down of the Experiment Farm the opportunity for conducting experiments in an approved manner under skilled supervision has been lost and the efforts of the Department of Agriculture are confined to itinerant services. That Department has not failed to render the industry all the assistance within its power. Its officers ably assisted by a number of employees on farms, who have gained experience of flax growing elsewhere, have advanced considerably the knowledge of flax growing in this colony.

Conclusion.

At present the future of the industry cannot be judged with assurance. Apart from the disappointment and loss suffered from the heavy importation of seed in 1911, acquired through the Flax Control Board, the heavy expenditure incurred in 1912 and 1921 in the installation of plant and machinery, and the heavier commitments due to the shortage in currency, the heavy slump in prices which for extended periods fell to a point below cost of production has prevented the industry from becoming prosperous. With a substantial advance in values of flax and low the acreage is likely to increase, but the crop will and should be confined to those higher and colder areas already mentioned. The number of European occupiers of holdings in these areas is small and there are limits to the acreage which can be handled on an individual holding. It should be noted that in these areas the choice of marketable crops which can be profitably grown is restricted. In those best suited to flax the climate is for the most part too cold or too wet for maize, which therefore only occupies a secondary place in the field husbandry on such farms, or is not grown at all.

But in some good flex districts wheat and barley are grown successfully, buck wheat may succeed, and in the course of time and with that experience which cannot be quickly acquired in a new country a profitable farming system, in which flex growing plays an important part may be evolved and become settled in its stride.

FLAX, TOTAL PRODUCTION, ACREAGE HARVESTED AND YIELD PER ACRE OF FLAX FIBRE: NOT AND BLENDED FOR A PERIOD 1920, 1921, and 1922.

IN THE COLONY AND DEPENDENCIES OF NORTHERN TERRITORIES

FLAX COLONY.	TOTAL PRODUCTION.			ACREAGE HARVESTED BETWEEN 1st JULY and 30th JUNE.	YIELD PER ACRE.			MILLS. No.	SCOUTING VEHICLES.
	FINES. Cwt.	TOW. Cwt.	LINSEED. Bags of 100 lbs.		FINES. cwt.	TOW. cwt.	LINSEED. Bags of 100 lbs.		
1920	18768	21878	12300	2207	2.50	2.52	1.32	68	1874
1921	27022	40224	24424	22478	1.43	1.91	1.02	107	1742
1922	22722	27072	12722	14227	1.52	1.92	0.74	102	1622

C. D.
R 14 SEP.
D 15

Downing Street,

18 Sept. 1923.

Sir,

With reference to your

letter of the 13th March last
and previous correspondence, I

am etc. to transmit to you, for
the information of the Empire

Flax Growing Committee, the

accompanying copy of a despatch

from the O.A.G. of Kenya, enclo-
sing a report on the flax

industry of the Colony prepared

by

Ind
DRAFT.

SECRETARY,

EMPIRE FLAX GROWING
COMMITTEE.

MINUTE.

(13102)

- Mr. Jewell 13.9.23.
- Mr. ~~Parsons~~ 15.9.23
- Mr. ~~Calden~~ 14.9
- Mr. Davis
- Mr. G. Grindle
- Mr. H. Ross
- Mr. J. Masterton Smith.
- Mr. Omsby-Gore.
- Duke of Devonshire.

250, 9th Aug. 1923.

by the Director of Agriculture.

I am, etc.,

(Signed) G. BUNDLE