

1923

KENYA

182

C O  
13102

RE  
PL 14 MAR 23

FLAX GROWING  
COMMITTEE

DATE

13TH MARCH 1923

CIRCULATION:—

*Calden*  
*Bostonley*

SUBJECT

FLAX INDUSTRY

Reports as to prospects in Kenya. Hopes cultivation will be encouraged in every possible way. Offers to send small deputation to discuss question.

Previous Paper

*Fr. 2*

*2/3/23*

MINUTES

The position seems to have changed since 6/3/22 when the Committee were urging for financial assistance so as to prevent the Kenya flax growers from disintegrating altogether. The tone of this letter is much more optimistic.

It appears that Kenya flax growers in the opinion of the <sup>flax</sup> committee, likely to stand up for itself in the future, as

- (1) its quality compares favourably with ~~those~~ <sup>that of</sup> flax from other sources
- (2) it has made itself known amongst the shippers

Its prospects have impressed flax importers sufficiently to induce them to advance money to exporters in Kenya and the Committee state that it would not now appear to be necessary for the first to

Subsequent Paper

*E.C.*

*2/12/23*  
*ES*

Copy to you con. 11/4/23

we for an oral assistance.

As there has been an improvement in the ~~for~~ situation Kenya will no doubt be fulfilling its obligations but they should have their correspondence before them. But before we send it out it seems that the Committee could tell us a good deal more as to their view on how the arrangement they speak of on page 2 final could be given by the Dept of Agriculture. I hear do not answer the point put at the end of C.O. letter no 63704/21. I wonder whether Kenya's proposals would not be well advised to sell their stocks now for what they will fetch? It would be a good thing therefore to hold a small conference, as the Committee suggest, before sending the correspondence to Kenya.

W.I.

Also see also 3397/23 Kenya

885

20.3.23

I rather doubt if there would be much advantage in asking the Committee to send a deputation. This letter was

... financial assistance.  
... there has been an  
... movement in the ~~for~~ situation  
... all and doubt be fully  
... about it but they would  
... since their correspondence  
... before them. But before we  
... in it, we see that the  
... Committee could tell us a  
... good deal more and then we  
... we have management they  
... need on this point.  
... and a review of the Dept of  
... of it. There do not  
... answer we have put at the  
... end of the letter 3394/23. It  
... whether Henry's expression  
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... sell their stocks now for what  
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... small conference, as the Committee  
... suggest, before sending the  
... correspondence to Kenya.

171.  
Please also 3397/23 Kenya

875

20.3.23

I rather doubt if there would  
be much advantage in asking  
the Committee to send a  
deputation. The letter was

the ground as far as possible 183

? Perhaps, thank for the  
full statement and say that, as  
the prospects of flax-growing in  
Kenya appear more promising  
than the letter of 21<sup>st</sup> Dec.  
indicated, a copy of the  
correspondence is being sent to  
the Gov. with a request that  
the Dept. of Agriculture will  
continue to assist the  
cultivation of flax as far as  
possible, & write for accordingly.

W.C.  
20.3.23

The report will be to the C<sup>o</sup>  
that the Gov<sup>t</sup> had be asked  
to report fully as to the  
present position of the  
local industry, & that the  
the receipt of the report  
the S. off. will be better  
able to judge whether it  
is necessary to take  
advantage of their offer to

to send a deputation.

W.C.S.

20. 3. 23

Mr Ormsby - free

This is interesting &  
hopeful.

As proposed?

H. J. S.

Yes. 21/11/23

We might also inform  
them that the Governor is  
leaving home next month  
& we would arrange for  
a deputation to see him  
at the C. C. at once

W.C.S.  
21. 3. 23



13th March, 1923.

Empire Flax Growing Committee.

Sir,

I am directed by my Committee to refer to your letter of the 13th January (No. <sup>n.j.</sup> 63704/22) respecting the position of flax-growing in Kenya. My Committee note with much regret that, owing to the apparent difficulty of securing an adequate return on flax, the Duke of Devonshire is considering whether he should not suggest to the Kenya Government that they should advise those who are still producing flax to discontinue their endeavours. We are asked to state what are the future prospects of flax and whether any steps are possible to secure the sale of Kenya flax at remunerative prices.

Your Department will be aware, that the cultivation of flax in Kenya is a comparatively recent departure. Many persons who had never before grown flax endeavoured to cultivate this fibre when the price of flax was about £400 a ton hoping that considerable profits would accrue therefrom. Flax, however, is a fairly difficult crop to grow successfully and much experience is necessary in order that a readily saleable fibre may be produced. Owing to the fact that retting and scutching can only be undertaken during the rainy season, 18 months usually elapse between the planting and the time when the whole of the resultant crop becomes ready for the market. Although growers in Kenya commenced the cultivation of this plant when prices were about £400 per ton, it is an unfortunate fact that when their fibre was ready for sale the market price had fallen to about £100 per ton owing to the general world depression in trade.

A

A consultation with two of the biggest flax merchants who handle Kenya flax enables my Committee confidently to assure His Grace that flax can be grown in Kenya to show a profit, even at present prices. They, therefore, hope that the cultivation of this fibre will be encouraged by the Department of Agriculture in every possible way.

No doubt the difficulty of marketing has proved a considerable handicap to the development of Kenya flax due to some extent to the poor fibre that was originally produced. The flax that is now arriving from Kenya is, we are informed, of a very good quality and equal in some cases to the best that is produced in any other country with the exception perhaps of some of the best Courtrai flax. In this connection, I transmit herewith a copy of an extract from a letter from the Flax Spinners Association at Belfast, reporting on various samples of Kenya flax and tow.

Another reason for the difficulty of disposal was the conservatism of Spinners. It will readily be appreciated that when a spinner turns out a regular yarn year in and year out, he becomes familiar with a certain grade of flax which is obtained from a well-known source. Until flax from this particular source becomes difficult to obtain, the spinner will not be inclined to experiment with other types of flax. As far as Kenya is concerned we have ascertained that this difficulty has now been overcome, marketing difficulties have practically vanished and merchants in this country can readily sell Kenya flax within a reasonable time, and spinners require a continuance of those supplies to maintain certain grades of manufacture which they have established from them. They have disposed of this flax not only in England, Scotland, Ireland, but also on the Continent and America and there is

now a steady demand for it.

The shortage of flax which led to the plant being cultivated in Kenya was due to the collapse of Russia who, in pre-war days, produced the bulk of the world supplies of flax. We are, however, informed that Kenya flax, as now produced by some growers, is better than much of the Russian, and as there has always been an increasing demand for the better type of fibre, ~~and~~ my Committee, therefore, would urge that steps should be taken in the Colony to ensure that the flax produced should be of as high a quality as possible, especially as the higher grades yield the greatest profit to the growers.

My Committee is glad to state that the difficulty of financing flax crops in Kenya has in some measure been met by the co-operation of London Flax Merchants who willingly grant liberal advances against flax ready for shipment. We are informed that these English import houses advance up to £60 per ton f.o.b. Mombassa for Number 4 grade flax, and £25 per ton for Number 2 grade tow. This has no doubt been brought about by the favourable opinion which merchants here have of Kenya flax and it would not now appear to be necessary for the Kenya Government to give financial assistance, especially seeing that local Banks are still willing to advance money for development.

The question of the development and subsequent disposal of flax as produced by Kenya is a wide problem and one which cannot satisfactorily be thoroughly discussed by correspondence. If, therefore, there are any other points which His Grace might care to raise on the matter, I am to state that my Committee will be only too pleased to send a small deputation

to the Colonial Office in order that the whole ground can  
be covered to our mutual satisfaction.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

*Frank Warner*

Chairman.



EXTRACT FROM LETTER RECEIVED FROM THE FLAX  
SPINNERS' ASSOCIATION LTD.

-----

"The Sub-Committee appointed by the Flax Spinners' Association to view the Kenya flax and tow and report thereon, made their examination on 26th February in the stores of Messrs. W.W. Kennedy & Co.

The values set down for the various grades were arrived at by comparison with prices at present ruling for Courtraf, Irish, Russian and other flaxes, but this does not imply that yarns could be made from flax at these prices to cover cost at to-day's yarn prices.

District Gilgill. The flax from all this district was well handled in the retting, scutching and baling, and was in good condition.

D F A	1st Grade	warp	£130.	per ton c.i.f. Belfast.
D T B	2nd "	weft	£115.	
D T C	3rd "	"	£110	samples examined showed very little difference from Grade 2.
D T E	5th "	"	£80.	

District Londani.

H F F S	3rd Grade	£100.	the handling of this lot was fair but the quality not up to Gilgill district.
L F S	3rd Grade )		There was little difference between the samples examined, - they were distinctly worse than the flax from the other estate in this district and were judged not suitable for the Belfast market.
L F S	4th Grade )		

Tow.

M A F	1st Grade	valued at	£55.	per ton c.i.f. Belfast.
F S	2nd Grade	" "	£52.	Very little difference from 1st Grade.
F S	3rd Grade	" "	£48.	
M A F	Below "		-	poor.

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On some previous occasions East African Flax had been so very tightly pressed as to permanently injure the flax and largely destroy its value, making it less acceptable in this market.

The members of the sub-committee were glad to see that the flax was not too tightly packed, and consider the bundles of a few pounds weight, say from 1 to 2 stone, tied with two or three bands are the most suitable way for the flax to be "welded up".

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Kenya  
13102/23

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Annot.  
43682

DRAFT.

26 March 1923

1147

Mr. Coynston

MINUTE.

Sir,

No. 9  
on 53810/23

Inth ref to my desp, No 1643,  
of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nov, I have to

Mr. Brett Mar 22

Mr. Bottomley 22/3/

Mr. Davis.

Sir G. Grindle.

Sir H. Read.

Sir J. Masterton Smith

Mr. Ormsby-Gore.

Duke of Devonshire.

transmit to you, for your consider,

a copy of courses with the  
Empire Flax Growing Com<sup>tee</sup>,

regarding flax-growing in Kenya

2. I shall be glad if you

will arrange for the Dept of  
Agriculture to continue to  
assist the cultivation

21 Dec  
13 Jan

+3704/22  
13 Mar

13102

rdfb

of place as far as possible,  
as suggested by the Committee,  
and, ~~will report fully by~~  
~~as the means~~

~~are as to the position of~~

the local industry is by

no means ~~far~~ clear, it will be  
of great assistance if I can

be furnished with a full  
report on the subject

}  
**DEVONSHIRE**

M.S.  
13102/23

Kenya

C. D.  
MAR 22 1923

*[Handwritten initials]*

26 March 1923

Sir,

DRAFT.

Chairman,  
Flax Growing Com<sup>tee</sup>

MINUTE.

- Mr. Brett Mar 22
- Mr. Bottomley 22 *fr*
- Mr.
- Mr. Davis.
- Sir G. Grindle.
- Sir H. Read.
- Sir J. Masterton Smith.
- Mr. Ormsby-Gore.
- Duke of Devonshire.

I am to ack. the rec<sup>d</sup> of your letter of the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, regarding the prospects of the flax ~~flax~~ industry in Kenya and to express his thanks for the full statement which the Committee have made on the subject.

2. As the prospects of flax-growing in Kenya appear more promising than your letter

*off*

No. 63949/22  
Don't  
Jan

of the No. of Dec. indicated,  
a copy of the Cori<sup>o</sup> is being  
sent to the Govt, with a request  
that the Dept of Agriculture will  
continue to assist the cultivation  
of flexus for as possible.

3 The Govt will be asked to  
report fully as to the present position  
of the local industry & on the rec<sup>t</sup> of  
the report His Grace will be better able  
to judge whether it is necessary to take  
advantage of your offer to send a deputation  
to this Office. The Govt is returning to  
England next month & arrangements could be  
made for him to see the deputation.  
etc

(Signed) H. J. READ



of the No. of Dec. indicated,  
a copy of the Cori<sup>o</sup> is being  
sent to the Govt, with a request  
that the Dept of Agriculture will  
continue to assist the cultivation  
of flour as far as possible.

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made for him to see the deputation.

Jrc

(Signed) H. J. READ

Ms. 63949/22 <sup>Don</sup> Jc