

Questions Relating to Agricultural Practice.—Contd.

tion experienced in Natal being probably due to the abnormal formation of wax on the cane during the long cool dry winter season, which has no counterpart in the American tropics."

Question No. 48.—"By what percentage will the humus content of such soils that is, old cane lands of a sandy nature that have become deficient in humus, be increased by the growing and ploughing in of a moderate unfertilised crop of mixed cow peas under ordinary conditions?"

Reply by Mr. Dodds: A good crop of say nine tons per acre of cow peas will contain about 16 per cent, that is, one and a half tons of dry organic matter.

The average weight of soil is about 1,500 tons per acre to a depth of 12 inches, consequently a crop of cow peas such as the above turned in to a depth of one foot would only increase the organic matter in the soil by 0.1 per cent. As mentioned elsewhere the benefit of a green manure crop cannot be determined in this way, the principal benefits probably being the improvement in texture and physical properties of the soil and changes in the bacterial flora.

Question No. 49.—"What percentage of increase in humus can be expected from the application of three tons of average moderately dry kraal manure per acre?"

Reply by Mr. Dodds: The same considerations apply here, the actual increase in humus content of the soil brought about by the application of three tons per acre of kraal manure being negligible, and the cause of the undoubted improvement brought about by the application of organic manures must be sought in other directions. The composition and especially the moisture content of air dried kraal manure varies so enormously with general conditions that it is impossible to give any reliable average figure. But assuming air-dried kraal manure to contain one-half of its own weight of dry organic matter three tons would contribute $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons of humus to the soil which would increase the quantity per acre to a depth of one foot by 0.1 per cent.

Question No. 50.—"What percentage of increase in humus content can be expected in the trashing and ploughing in of the trash of a field of say 25 tons per acre cane as opposed to the burning and loss of the same trash?"

Reply by Mr. Dodds: Experiments published by Dymond at the 1923 Sugar Congress showed that a crop of 25 tons per acre of sugar cane contained 7070 lbs of trash and 22,670 lbs of green tops equivalent to 526 tons of humus per acre from the trash and 267 lbs per acre from the tops which is equivalent to 0.017 per cent in the soil to a depth of one foot from the trash, and 0.008 per cent from the tops, or 0.025 per cent in all. The quantity of trash and its composition are very variable factors, however, and the quantity of organic matter involved may be very much greater than this. Thus in Queensland it was found that green leaves of Uba cane from Natal contained 25 per cent of dry organic matter in place of the 9.2 per cent in the dry trash corresponding to 7.4 in the trash as cut, found in the above experiments.

Question No. 51.—"Would it be unreasonable to expect an increase of two per cent of humus in a soil containing already 1.7 per cent of humus, making a total of 3.7 per cent after the application of five tons of air dry filter press cake per acre?"

Reply by Mr. Dodds: Yes. The increase in humus content of a soil from the application of five tons of air-dry filter press cake would not be anything like two per cent but only one-tenth of this increase. According to Dymond dry filter press cake in Natal contains 63 per cent of organic matter equivalent to three tons of humus from an application of 5 tons of press cake per acre. This corresponds to 0.2 per cent on 1,500 tons the approximate weight of one acre of soil one foot in depth, and an increase in total humus of the soil in question from 1.7 to 1.9 per cent.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO WHITE LABOUR.

Question No. 52.—"Can you give the Congress any information regarding the economic results of the use of White Labour in agricultural industry generally having in view the alternative use of Native labour?"

Question No. 53.—"Have you good reasons to submit in favour of sugar planters employing white labour and to what kinds of work and type of labour do these reasons apply?"

Mr. H. Fowler, Chief Factories Inspector, combined his replies to these two questions, as follows:

"I have come down here to represent the Department of Labour and in doing so I wish to express

on behalf of the Department the thanks of the Department to the Congress in allowing us to be represented here, and at the same time I have to offer an apology because I am not the best representative that could have been sent. The Secretary for Labour would have liked to have come, and he has asked me to apologise that his duties in Cape Town have prevented him from coming. It was also the intention to send down the Chief Welfare Officer who is far more au fait with the work than I am. The Minister of Labour has indicated the policy of the Department on more than one occasion more especially last year at the Agricultural Congress.

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where he met a committee of sugar planters I believe:

It is a question which is a very difficult one and one which cannot in any way be rushed. On Wednesday last I saw Col. Creswell in Johannesburg and he wished me to stress the question that this is one of great difficulty and therefore what may appear to be delays on the part of the Department are really caused from the very carefulness with which every scheme has to be investigated. He wished me to say that of course he would welcome any reasonable scheme that can be brought before him, and he is only too pleased to co-operate in every possible way, and he asks for the co-operation in every possible way of all agriculturists.

Up to the present the experience of this Department in regard to rural employment is somewhat meagre. At first men were sent out for employment on farms without any process of training or testing. Machinery, except so far as the Forestry scheme is concerned, did not exist for these purposes.

The Tenant-farmer scheme has, however, altered this state of affairs and it is expected that very valuable information will be collected as to the capacity of men at present on relief works of becoming independent farmers. It is, of course, too early to express any definite opinion as to the success of the scheme—some 400 tenant-farmers have been placed up to the present and some have been working for the best part of a year. There are indications that a very large percentage will make good.

Bulletins as to the scope and progress of the scheme are published from time to time by the Department and will be one of the features of the Labour Gazette which is about to be published as part of the Journal of Industries. The first number will appear in April.

The bulk of the tenant-farmers are recruited from forestry works. Records in regard to capacity for work, character and suitability for the life of a farmer are kept and careful selections are made. In addition to these schemes a training farm is being established in the Transvaal at Hartebeestfontein and it is hoped to provide for some 400 to 500 families. Men will be recruited for the farm from existing relief works. Two grades of stations are being provided for. The entry to the farm will be from relief works to a "B" station. Here a fixed wage will be paid to all employees, suitable housing will be provided with medical facilities which will be under the control of the Department. Native labour will be excluded entirely and liquor will be rigorously excluded.

From this "B" station the best workers will be sent on to an "A" station where the facilities will be better and the rate of pay granted according to the capacity and merit of the worker. Provision

will have to be made for a "C" class of man, especially the crippled, aged and infirm men incapable of performing a day's work. For this class the best provision would appear to be the establishment of Rural Alms Villages quite apart from the training farms.

It is hoped that it will be possible to pass approximately 100 men per annum for "A" stations to the tenant-farmer scheme, to probationary Land Settlement schemes, and to farmers as overseers, etc. Steps are being taken to establish further training farms in the other Provinces. It is hoped by this scheme that in course of time the Department will be able to provide trained and tested men for the agricultural industry. The success of the scheme, of course, depends considerably on the sympathetic co-operation of agriculturists. Transvaal farmers have been pleasantly surprised on the whole with the type of men sent them as tenant-farmers, consequently the demand for tenant-farmers is growing to such an extent that it is under contemplation that in addition to the seven Welfare Officers engaged on the obtaining of applications in the Transvaal more will perhaps have to be appointed.

The advantages of procuring a reliable man on the farm can well be left to the imagination of farmers. Selection of tenant-farmers is carried out very carefully and tenant-farmers selected from the various forestries are medically fit and used to hard work and will do well in a supervising capacity on sugar estates.

The average loan of £90 each for 400 tenant-farmers has in all cases been sufficient to provide for building material, trek gear, livestock and implements, and it is suggested that tenant-farmers in Natal be used in the capacity of foremen or overseers in return for which the owner allots to each say 12 acres of established cane and 12 acres land on which cane can be established. This arrangement would, together with the subsidy of nine months full and 6 months half, secure the tenant-farmer a living during the first two years; thereafter he would earn more, and, if thrifty, make good.

I feel convinced that should planters once have the actual experience with selected tenant-farmers that the demand in Natal for tenant-farmers would be equal to that in the Transvaal.

Mr. Staniland: A hundred men seems a small number to be transferred from "B" scheme to "A" scheme in a year. I should have thought the number would be a great deal more.

Mr. Fowler: I should have explained that the idea is this: there is only one scheme for the Transvaal. We hope to establish similar schemes in each Province, but the one in the Transvaal has been put on a very conservative basis. We hope to do better later on. We hope to employ twelve hundred men at one time, but owing to certain circumstances at

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present we have put that on a conservative basis. The figures given are only for the Transvaal.

Mr. G. H. Hulett: Last year I understand that the Government were prepared, in case of a planter wanting an overseer, to allow the planter £100 or £150 to erect a building on loan, repayable over a certain number of years, and that they would also allow so much a month up to £5 a month, so that a planter might employ this man without an outlay of considerable money to commence with. That scheme rather commended itself to me, and I spoke to several planters in my neighbourhood and elsewhere, and nearly all of them were prepared to take on men.

I communicated with the Department on the subject but I was told the matter was under further consideration, and I should get a reply later on. We have not had that reply. I do not know whether that scheme has been withdrawn, and I would like to know if it is still available. If an application is put in to-day will the Department give £150 and £5 a month for a certain period, and after that the man would have to receive a wage that the Department agrees is fair.

Mr. Fowler: The tenant-farmer scheme still holds good and the terms are up to £150 advance and for the first nine months 45/- for parents and 12/6 for each child, and for the following six months half of that, not exceeding a maximum of £5 7s. 6d. a month.

Mr. Hulett: These planters were not prepared to give a share in the estates at all. The men must work as overseers and take the place of Indian and Native overseers. A lot of these young men are just starting in life and cannot spare the money. If they can get assistance in erecting a man's house they would prefer employing a white man until thoroughly established. Later on it is fully intended that the men should get a living wage.

Mr. Fowler: Schemes of this nature have been put up to the Department and are receiving very careful consideration. But there are difficulties of administration. If you have tenant-farmers they have to be kept under very careful supervision and we find that if they are scattered about in ones and twos in different parts of the country the administrative charges to keep them under proper supervision mounts up to such an extent that we have to make a survey of the country and to work on a properly organised system and take a particular district and place twenty to thirty men in that district. By doing that the administrative charges are less. At present the Department is trying to work it on a system of placing them in groups. With regard to the employment of individuals I don't remember whether we have any definite scheme except that as I have said we make the suggestion to planters that we will in the course of time be able to give them selected men to take the place of Indians who, I

understand sometimes draw wages up to £15 a month. Is there any reason therefore why that money should not be paid to a white man? After all the Sugar Industry owes something to the country; it gets a certain amount of protection and in return it should be possible to take white overseers and pay them the same wage as other races get.

Chairman: Are these men available at the present time.

Mr. Fowler: There are a certain number available.

Mr. Townsend: The difficulty in this question is that the majority of the men would not be able to speak the Native language, they would be entirely ignorant of the Indian language, and those men employed as overseers would be pretty hopeless for a time. A scheme of that sort seems to be entirely in the air. The scheme the industry would like to try and work is: is it not possible for the Government to form gangs of men to take the place of the cutters. Any scheme for the placing of men who are entirely ignorant of the local conditions and who do not understand the languages of the Natives and Indians, would be hopeless I am afraid.

Mr. Staniland: That is quite true. That is a weakness but that does not alter the great question that is before us—the absorption of white labour. If we are determined, if we have any zeal, any respect, any enthusiasm, I think we ought to make a great effort in regard to the placing of white labour. What can we do? Are we going to sit down idly? It resolves into this, that each planter individually has to try and do what he can to absorb white labour. Presently the Government will probably have a matured scheme to put before us.

In the meantime what we have listened to brings nothing mature before us; it leaves us in the same position we were in six months ago when we gave the assurance that we would try and absorb as much white labour as we could. That assurance stands to-day and I would like it to go back to the Minister, that we as sugar planters will try and fall in with any matured scheme that the Government will bring before us. After all we are all labourers.

Mr. Fowler: I would like to say that we don't hold that we have any hard and fast scheme. After all the Government can only do a part. One of the great difficulties has been that there has been no classification of the unemployed. People have been pitch-forked into relief works all over the country without any system of trying to find out if they are efficient or not. We are endeavouring to classify, train and list them, and come forward and say we have a supply of labour which we can guarantee, and we ask you on your part to do your share and say you will find openings for them. That is the position. (Applause).