

# Pineapple Problems

R. L. Goodwin, Ft. Pierce

Pineapples have been successfully grown commercially on the East Coast of Florida during over 30 years.

The industry brought about a million dollars annually into St. Lucie county, until 1915, at which time many fields had become old and unprofitable, and a large percentage of the fruit small and unmarketable.

A dying off of plants appeared in many fields. This condition was recognized as "Wilt," something that had always been known on a small scale but not feared up to that time by the growers in St. Lucie county.

The industry had been wiped out gradually in the vicinity of West Palm Beach, but St. Lucie county growers felt that pineapples were exempt from pests or disease and could be grown on the same piece of land indefinitely; that when a field needed replanting all that was necessary was either to remove the old plants and plow the land or grub the old plants under and replant. In some locations fields have been planted three times in 25 years. One field was kept well fertilized and by filling in vacant places from time to time was made to yield profitable crops for 26 consecutive years.

When the war broke out with Germany the shipments of potash were cut off and potash later disappeared from the pine-

apple fertilizers. Consider for a moment that in Florida, in a sub-tropical climate, we have growing a tender tropical plant—the pineapple. We found by experiment that we could harden the pineapple plant by using a good percentage of potash in our fertilizer mixtures so that there was less liability to injury by cold waves. We had also learned that applying ammoniates without potash made the plants tender and very susceptible to injury by cold. Potash not being available except at an exorbitant price, the grower applied only ammoniates and phosphates, such as blood and bone, tankage, etc.

In February, 1917, a frost injured the plants; a year of drought followed, and in December, 1917, another cold wave did damage. 1918 was another dry year and the pineapple grower threw up the sponge when fertilizers became as valuable as gold dust.

In the meanwhile the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington and the State Agricultural Experiment Station at Gainesville were conducting experiments on various plantations to develop a method of control for red spiders, mealy bugs, and nematodes (root knot); and were seeking for parasites and other agencies that might be responsible for pineapple troubles. Plant selection, fumigation, soil sterilization,

disinfection of soil and of plants have been carried on. Natal, napier grass and rattle box have been tried as rotating crops, and healthy plants sterilized, fumigated and planted in 1919 show signs of giving a good crop this season. Plots of ground on old fields have been steamed, and others treated with formaldehyde or with carbon bisulphide. The experiments are being conducted to prove or disprove the many theories that have been advanced and the information obtained will always be of value to whoever grows pineapples in Florida.

An association for the Promotion of Pineapple Culture was formed in July, 1919, and about \$1,500 was raised to help the State carry out its experimental work. The treasury is at low ebb at the present time, but money will be forthcoming in same way. The work must not stop!

There are fields that went through the cold spells of 1917 with little injury, and were fertilized normally that fruited well last year and the fruit brought high prices. A few fields that were cleaned off and allowed to remain fallow in 1917 and 1918, were replanted in 1919 and at the present writing the plants are full of

bloom and promise a 90% crop. The plants look healthy. One field, belonging to D. T. McCarty, is located on Riverside Drive, Dixie Highway, one mile south of Ft. Pierce, and is observed by every one passing. One company has made contracts to replant a thousand or more acres of pineapples during the coming season and there is hopes of the industry being restored.

The land immediately adjoining and overlooking the Indian River is in demand as winter resident sites, and the location is beautiful with about 35 feet elevation above the river and a hard asphalted road over which all automobiles pass to and from Miami and Palm Beach.

Many acres of the old pineapple belt will never be planted to pineapples again. Other crops such as limes, guavas, avocados, pigeon peas, cassava and nursery stock have been planted and will produce an income.

Local pineapple plants are very scarce and high in price, but plants will be imported from other parts of the world, and in a few more years the pineapple industry will again be an important factor in Florida's upbuilding.