Gascoyne research station field day
ABOUT 100 banana-growers and local residents were present at the Gascoyne Research Station, Carnarvon, on May 28 when the station's first field day was opened by the Deputy-Director of Agriculture (Mr. A. L. McKenzie Clark).

Mr. Clark apologised on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture (Sir Charles Latham) and the Director of Agriculture (Mr. G. K. Baron-Hay) who were unable to attend. He said that he was pleased to have been asked to perform the opening ceremony as he felt that he was responsible, in some measure at least, for the establishment of the North-West Branch of the Department of Agriculture in December, 1950.

Mr. W. M. Nunn, the Officer-in-Charge of the branch, had been occupied for several years in the administration of the Kimberley Research Station and the Abydos and Woodstock Stations in the Port Hedland district, said Mr. Clark, so that he was already familiar with many of the problems of the northern areas.

Since the establishment of the branch, four agricultural science graduates and a beef cattle adviser have been appointed to the North-West and these officers will be employed on various extension and research projects aimed at increasing production in these areas.

Mr. Clark said it was the intention of the Department of Agriculture to widen the scope of the Gascoyne Research Station to embrace such work as pasture development and sheep husbandry. As a first step in this direction an agrostologist from the Wagga Research Station, N.S.W., would shortly be joining the staff of the research station. He would be employed on the development of drought-resisting grasses in collaboration with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation which is carrying out similar work in Queensland.

Mr. Clark said that he was sure that producers in the North would appreciate that sound farming principles could only be developed with the aid of scientific research and he hoped that the growers would feel that this was their station and discuss their problems freely with the Departmental officers.

EXPERIMENTAL PLOTS

Mr. W. D. S. Marr, the Tropical Adviser, conducted the visitors through the station's experimental section, giving commentaries on the various projects.

The first was the "close-planting trial," designed to determine whether it was practicable to plant bananas three times as close as is normally practised in the Carnarvon area.
The normal planting method is to plant on the square 10ft. x 10ft. (435 plants to the acre) in the first year. Three suckers or followers are left on each of these plants so that there are 1,305 in the second year. This number of producing stems is then maintained for a number of years.

In the close-planting trial now being tested, approximately 1,400 are planted in the first year and this number is maintained by leaving one sucker on each plant.

The weights and grades of fruit from the close-planted plot will be compared with those from an adjoining plot of identical area where the orthodox planting intervals were used.

Mr. Marr pointed out that if the trees on the close-planted plot give individual yields comparable with those of the wide-planted first-year trees, the grower's income would be three times what he would normally collect from a first-year crop.

Growers were shown a close-planted plot, one-third of an acre in extent, which had been established two and a half years ago. The appearance of the trees and the yield figures provided were most impressive and provoked much interest and discussion.

Sprinklers v. flood irrigation of bananas provided an interesting object lesson. The plants under flood irrigation were much taller and of a healthier appearance than those watered by sprinklers. It appears that the salt content of the irrigation water is more harmful to the plants when applied by sprinklers, a fact which is always much more noticeable under drought conditions.

**PAPAW TRIALS**

Interest was shown in several hundred papaw plants of selected Queensland varieties which were being grown with the dual object of testing the market and determining the best methods of packing and transporting the fruit to minimise wastage and damage.

Mr. Marr said that papaws might provide an additional cash crop to bananas and beans under Carnarvon conditions. One of the current problems, he said, was that at present they had no certain method of distinguishing between male and female plants in the young stages. Since only a small
proportion of males were needed for adequate fertilisation, surplus male plants had to be culled out and replaced by females until the correct proportions were established.

SOIL TREATMENTS
In the absence of the Plant Nutrition Officer (Dr. T. C. Dunne), Mr. W. M. Nunn gave a short description of the soil treatment experiments designed to investigate the effects of varying quantities of gypsum, lime and sulphur on banana growth. Gypsum had been shown to have beneficial effects on diseased banana plants in the Yankeetown area but as the bananas on the research station did not suffer from the disease to any marked extent, no significant differences were to be seen on the treated plots.

Mr. Nunn expressed the hope that, in the near future, the Department might be able to carry out similar trials on bananas already affected by deficiency diseases and he hoped to obtain the cooperation of the growers to this end.

PINEAPPLES AND AVOCADOS
Conducting visitors over the area under pineapples, Mr. Marr, who was formerly an adviser on pineapple growing in Queensland, said that he was disappointed with the results obtained in growing this fruit at Carnarvon.

He had expected that pineapples would thrive under Carnarvon conditions, but to date, this had not been the case. Although the plants appeared healthy and robust at the time of inspection, they tended to deteriorate towards mid-winter. A small first crop could usually be obtained but the plants seldom threw sufficient suckers to provide a second crop. He attributed this to the high alkalinity of the Gascoyne levee soils, a condition which is only reduced with great difficulty.

He spoke concerning the avocado or “alligator pear” a popular tropical fruit in other countries which was doing well on the Gascoyne Research Station.

A well-grown pineapple of the smooth-leaved variety.

Showing spacing of pineapple suckers and method planting in slightly raised beds.
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While afternoon tea was being served by members of the Country Women's Association, Mr. R. G. Nailard, the manager of the research station, gave two short addresses. The first concerned the building of better packing sheds to ensure that bananas are handled under the best possible conditions before being sent to the markets. He then described the work carried out with bees at the station. Although the hives appeared to thrive in the area, they could not be regarded as a sound commercial proposition, he said, due to the lack of pollen over a large part of the year. Most of the nectar was obtained from the banana flowers which unfortunately do not produce pollen.

NEW BRANDING FLUID

A spectacular swing to the new L.B.E. sheep branding fluid is reported by Dr. M. Lipson, Officer-in-Charge of the C.S.I.R.O. Wool Textile Laboratory, Geelong, who claims the fluid meets a long-standing demand for a practical brand easily removed in scouring.

In explaining the development of L.B.E. (Lanolin Base Emulsion) Branding Fluid, Dr. Lipson said the prime object was to get a brand that could be removed easily during normal processing. Additional labour costs in removing brand residue and its adverse effect on the quality of woollen fabrics have been costing several hundred thousand pounds every year. In 1949, one firm alone spent over £20,000 in removing brand markings.

L.B.E. Branding Fluid meets manufacturers' demands for easy scouring and also graziers' requirements for a clear brand that remains legible and is easy to apply. The formula, first released by C.S.I.R.O. in 1950, is being used in South Africa, New Zealand and Great Britain, and Dr. Lipson expects the fluid will brand most sheep in Australia this season. A gallon, costing less than £1, is sufficient to brand 1,000 sheep.

Experience from research workers and graziers who have used this new branding fluid shows that certain precautions are necessary for best results:—

(1) Choose a colour that will contrast with the fleece, for example, a blue brand on red or black soil country.

(2) Avoid conditions that can cause rubbing of the brand before it dries. Remove the sheep from the pen as soon as possible and, where regulations permit, brand high up in the middle of the back.

(3) If possible, choose weather conditions permitting the brand to dry for an hour or two without the danger of smearing by rain.

(4) Do not use a brand made from thin wire carrying insufficient branding fluid.

Where regulations do not permit choice of colour or position, even greater attention should be given to the other directions. Special care is needed under more tropical conditions.

Further practical details can be supplied by sheep and wool extension officers of State Departments of Agriculture.

Research is developing new colours and a quicker drying fluid to reduce risk of the brand running when rain falls immediately after branding. Before any change in the present fluid can be recommended, a year's large scale testing is necessary on sheep properties in different climates, followed by commercial processing of the branded wool.
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