

1185. You do not try phosphorized grain in summer?—We do, and we find it is taken in summer also; but I do not think it desirable to go into summer-poisoning extensively. The spots that could be poisoned are those infested with rabbits—small colonies here and there.

1186. It is stated that in the summer the grain loses its strength?—Doubtless that is true to a certain extent. Much will depend upon the weather. If it is very hot weather, the phosphorus will evaporate; but at that time of the year we make it a point to put it out late in the evenings.

1187. How long do you think it could remain on the ground in the summer without losing its effect?—If wet, moist weather, it would remain several days. That is the proper time to put it out.

1188. And in fine weather?—If hot sunny weather, I would not rely upon it after twenty-four hours.

1189. Is there any danger of its setting fire to grass in summer?—No; properly mixed, there is little, if any, danger.

1190. What would be the cause of its setting fire to grass—excessive phosphorus?—Not necessarily; but if found in a crude state amongst the oats it would ignite.

1191. Have you proper means of mixing the poison?—We have several appliances for the purpose—casks with heads knocked in; and iron cylinders have been patented in the South Island, and have been found to be very efficacious. With these there is no escape of the phosphorus by steam, and hence it is all mixed. It is not a proper way to mix phosphorus in an open vessel. That used to be done before we became expert in the business.

1192. Do you think the small landholders have proper means of mixing it?—No. That is one of our greatest difficulties. We have three centres in Southland in which the department mixes the stuff and sells it to the settlers at 2d. per pound, which just covers the cost of the oats, the poison, and the labour.

1193. Where are those places?—At Winton, Invercargill, and Wyndham.

1194. Some of the settlers, of course, live a long distance from these centres; therefore, in buying the grain from the Government they would have to carry it some distance before they could lay it. Does not the poison evaporate?—Not at all.

1195. Do you think that arrangement a good one?—Yes; and I intend this year to adopt the system more largely. The difficulty we have is to induce them to take sufficient to enable us to employ a man constantly in mixing—an expert.

1196. Do you find any difficulty in getting persons interested to poison?—Not now; but it took us three years to educate them and overcome their prejudice.

1197. I suppose you are an advocate for simultaneous poisoning?—Yes. We recognize that as a matter of very great importance, and we give them timely notice—a fortnight and three weeks, as the case may be—to prepare themselves.

1198. Do you adopt a plan that has been adopted in some districts, of calling a meeting to consider the best time to begin poisoning?—No; I have never done that, inasmuch as I would not hold myself bound to obey any resolution of a public meeting. I have never called any, and I have never attended one.

1199. But would you not think it advisable to consult the owners of a district? Would it not secure greater unanimity in the matter?—I do not think so. I notice that the majority of meetings are apt to run counter to the department, and procrastinate, and will not do anything.

1200. What time do you decide upon?—I insert a notice in the papers announcing that the department is about to commence poisoning, and asking the settlers to co-operate at the same time.

1201. What period of the year?—This year we started advertising on the 14th of this month, and continued to the 20th; and then agents go round and see that the work is being carried out.

1202. You give them a week's notice, then, to carry out the work?—We announce the thing three weeks beforehand, and give them a week in which to make their preparations. The agents go round and see that the work is carried on simultaneously, and they report to me from week to week.

1203. How often do these agents go round?—They are supposed to be always going round.

1204. Have you any means of knowing whether they do or not?—I have not, unless I follow them.

1205. Can you check their work?—I can check a reasonable day's work by their diaries, because I know their districts; but I have to take a good deal on trust.

1206. Do you think any holders of land would commence poisoning when they expected the agent to come round, and would knock off directly he was gone?—No. I do not think they would try to deceive us in that way. There was a very strong prejudice, as I have said; but that has all disappeared in Southland, and the people have got familiarized with the manipulation of the grain. At first they were afraid of the phosphorus; but now they have no longer any misgivings about it, and are alive to their interests in working the thing—also the penalties in failing to comply with the requirements of the Act.

1207. Have you had any complaints?—I have not heard any. In my district there are about three thousand holdings, and I do not know one that has not laid poison where rabbits were known to exist.

1208. And you have not had any complaints that certain settlers ceased to lay poison after the agent had gone?—Yes; we have had complaints frequently. Neighbours complain of one another. It is often attempted to make the Sheep and Rabbit Act a sort of vehicle to revenge one another. But we find there is very little in these complaints in the majority of cases when we come to look into them. They are chiefly the outcome of private pique and spite.

1209. Then you do not think they shirk their work?—No.

1210. Still, you might have your own private opinion as to whether they were doing so, whether there were complaints or not?—It is my private opinion that there is little shirking now.