

Cross-bred wool has been receiving most attention for some time, this, coupled with the great demand for cross-bred sheep for freezing, has caused breeders to turn their attention to this class to the neglect of pure merinoes. The favourite cross from merino ewes is got by the Leicester ram, and from cross-bred ewes all the different breeds of rams have their advocates. In the North Island the Lincoln has for some years been principally used, but lately the other breeds, such as the Romney, Leicester, and Downs, have been coming to the front. For early freezing lambs, the Downs cross is considered the best; but if any of the ewe lambs have to be kept to replenish the breeding flock, then the question of wool must be considered, the wool from this cross being short and somewhat inferior in quality.

The lambing was above the average, being, say, merino 60 per cent., and other breeds 80 per cent. The satisfactory state in which the ewes came through the winter has had a good deal to do with this, and with the abundance of early feed the lambs received full justice. A large number were thus early fit for freezing, and a total of 343,087 were shipped. This is a question requiring the urgent attention of breeders, whether the present system of indiscriminately sending off the primest ewe lambs will not, in the near future, be a cause for regret, when it is found the flocks are deteriorating for want of young and vigorous blood.

The area of new land requiring stock is also becoming greater every year, and as for this stock must be found, it is feared that in many instances settlers are compelled to breed from old broken down culls, whose constitutions are entirely gone, as they find it impossible to secure young healthy ewes at anything like a reasonable price. Much of the heavy loss reported in certain districts must be attributed to the result of breeding from old ewes or their progeny.

Frozen Mutton and Lamb.—Attached is a table showing the number of carcasses exported from the different shipping ports for the year ending 31st March, 1892. It will be seen there has been a falling off of 78,178 carcasses. This, I think, can fairly be accounted for by the superabundance of feed, and the necessity of again stocking up much of the country on which (owing to the drought) the stock had for several years to be reduced, and also the large area of new country which is being opened up. The people at Home are now beginning to find out the advantage of having such an abundant supply of prime meat at a moderate cost, and this, combined with the increased facilities provided for shipping, storing, distributing, &c., has been the means of creating a larger demand, and of steadier prices being maintained. With care and judgment in the shipping of suitable meat, and the opening of new markets in the provinces, everything points to a largely increased demand in the future.

Disease.—As already mentioned, there has been a considerable mortality amongst the flocks in two or three districts, but it is satisfactory to note that Mr McClean, the Government Veterinarian, after having carefully examined the different cases, is able to report that it is purely of a local nature, and in no way infectious or contagious. His reports will be found attached. The "mysterious" disease, which has existed in the Tauranga District for many years, still causes considerable loss, but, from personal inquiries made, it has not been so troublesome this past season. When in that district, I made inquiries about securing a suitable piece of land, with the view of carrying out some experiments to, if possible, discover a means to combat this trouble; and negotiations are now pending which it is hoped will lead to a successful issue, so that early steps can be taken to commence operations. A pamphlet on the general treatment of sheep has been issued to all sheep-owners, and it is hoped it will be instructive.

Quarantine.—During the year a considerable number of stud sheep have been imported, and have undergone the usual quarantine. They consisted of Lincolns, Leicesters, Romneys, South-downs, Shropshires, and Hampshires, and from advices there is likely to be a continued increase year by year. It is satisfactory to note that sheep-breeders are alive to the necessity of improving their flocks. To encourage this, and to obviate as much as possible the unavoidable delay and expense, the quarantine-grounds have lately been much improved and enlarged. New regulations will also shortly be circulated simplifying the forms, and an endeavour is being made to reduce expenses in connection with the importing of stock.

CATTLE.

By the census returns furnished on the 4th April, 1891, there were 831,831 cattle in the colony, of which number 42,912 were owned by Maoris. The health of the stock has been generally satisfactory. A few cases of cancer, wasters, &c., were reported from several districts, and action was taken to have the beasts destroyed. It cannot, however, be too strongly urged of the absolute necessity of immediately destroying and burying any animal showing the slightest sign of disease. Breeding from such stock is only spreading the evil, and, although it may be a small monetary loss, the welfare of a district demands some sacrifice. I subjoin Mr McClean's report on a visit lately paid to Taranaki.

The market for frozen beef has been fairly satisfactory, and during the twelve months ending 31st March, 1892, there has been shipped from the following ports:—

					Cwt.	Valued at £
Auckland	...	...	...	...	5,969	8,211
Napier	...	...	...	...	11,724	11,947
Wellington	...	...	...	...	65,480	69,594
Poverty Bay	...	...	...	...	4,311	4,024
New Plymouth	...	...	...	...	19,973	19,036
Wanganui	...	...	...	...	2,018	2,352
Lyttelton	...	...	...	...	1,708	1,933
Dunedin	...	...	...	...	13	12
					111,196	£117,109