

As I have already informed you, the Docks Committee is ready and willing to find the money to put this up, at a cost of about £40,000. The site indicated could hardly be bettered, but the dock companies would require to be guaranteed about £7,000 a year. I have reason to believe that the shipping companies would probably find a third of this, if the Government and the producers could guarantee the rest. Meat could be delivered quickly and by the best methods into the shed, and thence passed into barges from one side of the building and into the railway-trucks from another. Many days' delay and much knocking-about of the carcasses would thus be saved.

You have doubtless heard recently that several of the steamers carrying our produce have also brought Home live cattle from the Argentine. I have been making inquiries into this through Mr. Cameron and others, and am satisfied that the practice is most objectionable and risky from the point of view of our producers. At present this cattle trade is being stopped for the sufficient reason that it has ceased to pay. But so far as I know there is no understanding that it will not be renewed should there be a prospect of revived profits. I would suggest that the Government and the producers keep a vigilant eye on the matter and combine to secure an undertaking that the practice shall not be resumed.

As for dairy produce, as distinct from meat, I cannot too strongly emphasize the necessity for discouraging the export of inferior brands both of cheese and butter. So long as our article can obtain and keep an equal rank with the best Australian and Canadian, so long may something like reasonable prices be relied upon on the average. But it will not be enough for the factories to manufacture a good article, and for butter, other than factory, to be kept from leaving the colony: that is only the beginning.

In spite of the sneers of some of the dealers here, I am convinced that the Government grading is of much value, especially if it is carefully inspected and reported on at this end.

As regards the temperature to be observed on the voyage, the best opinion seems to be that it should be from 10 deg. to 25 deg. in the case of butter, and 40 deg. to 45 deg. in the case of cheese.

As I have said before, I believe the shipping companies will undertake to keep within these limits. The companies at the other end ought to make such arrangements with agents here as will prevent butter lying in the stores at this end for days after arrival. The shipping company concerned ought to be authorised to put all consignments not properly claimed, or lying on hand, into the cold store, leaving the agents to get them out. It is as unfair as it is disastrous that excellent produce should be allowed to lie in cargo-sheds where the temperature may be anything between 40 deg. and 70 deg., and where the air may be tainted with the odours from bales of wool, or other kinds of cargo. I have seen this state of things myself, to the great detriment of our produce, and therefore, whatever are the denials from the agent concerned, I know it goes on.

So much has already been said from this end about the necessity of regularity in shipments in the case of dairy produce that I do not care to take up your time again restating the arguments. Suffice it to say that the more the shipments approximate to a system of weekly arrivals the better will the dealers be pleased, and the more likely we are to hold an equal place in favour with Canada and Victoria.

Then there is the question of the class of agents to be employed, and the number. The more powerful agents are naturally strongly of opinion that the trade should be concentrated in a few hands. However much discount may fairly be taken of views which coincide so closely with their own interests, one is still inclined to agree with them. The more competent the agent and the better his grasp of the market the better the sales he is likely to effect. The more regular his supplies are, too, the better chance he will have in the market. The practice of changing from agent to agent, and of employing men of second- or third-rate standing in the trade, seems likely to do the producer much more harm than good in the end. It leads to competition amongst sellers, and to the playing of strange tricks which disorganize the market. Competition amongst buyers is an excellent thing for the producer; but competition amongst selling agents is quite the reverse. One hears of such competition also in the meat trade, and there, too, results are plainly to the detriment of the grower.

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The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the PREMIER.

2nd October, 1897.

*Home Markets.*—I beg to enclose a report made by Mr. H. C. Cameron, giving information respecting the present condition of markets in this country for New Zealand mutton, and suggestions for the improvement of the same.

W. P. REEVES.

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Westminster Chambers, 13, Victoria Street, London, S.W.,

SIR,—

1st October, 1897.

I beg to submit for your consideration the following remarks *re* the present condition of the Home markets for New Zealand mutton, together with a suggestion which I consider feasible for the improvement of the same.

*How can the Demand for New Zealand Mutton in the Home Markets be improved?*

How to improve the demand for New Zealand mutton in the Home markets is a problem that should now, more than ever—if not too late—engross the attention of all who have the interest of the New Zealand frozen-meat trade as a whole at heart. Steadily year by year prices have been declining, until now they are so low that were it not for the concessions made periodically on freezing and freight charges the returns to shippers would be entirely unremunerative. It is an acknowledged fact that the quality of the New Zealand mutton lately arriving has been deteriorating,