

60. Some of them are suppliers, in fact?—Yes, whose interest it is to get the highest price for their sheep.

61. And has your company always paid a dividend?—No; for three years, I think, they paid no dividend at all.

62. During that time did they buy or freeze on owners' account?—Mostly they were freezing on Nelson Bros.' account.

63. And during that time they paid no dividend?—No.

64. And then the company started to buy?—Yes. The first year they started buying they paid no dividend either.

65. You send your buyers round to all the farmers, and when the buyer goes to a farmer the latter says generally, "I want you to take so many"?—Very often they do.

66. And because of the competition your buyer takes a very much larger number than he otherwise would take?—Sometimes our buyers take sheep they should not take.

67. Sheep that would not be bought at Addington yards?—Yes.

68. Does not that account for some of the difference in the price?—Yes. At Addington yards the sheep have to be classed by a yard classer before they are admitted into the fat-sheep pens. If a seller puts lean sheep into the fat pens the classer will have them removed to the store pens.

69. And practically the price at Addington means the price at the freezing-works?—I believe there is some arrangement that they have to be delivered at the works.

70. Your buyer pays for them at the owner's yard?—Yes. It costs about 7d. a sheep to deliver our sheep at the works, on an average.

71. I suppose it would cost the Wellington companies more than that on account of the railway rates: they could not offer more than that difference in the price?—It is a big item.

72. And then the companies in the South have not to keep buyers?—I think they have buyers out, but they have not the same distance to take the sheep to the works.

73. There is only one company that buys there?—I do not think the Belfast company buy yet.

74. The others have buyers out?—Yes; the Christchurch Meat Company have.

75. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] Are you aware that there is any dissatisfaction amongst the sheep-growers in the territory you cover as to the price you pay for sheep?—Yes; I understand there is, and some of them have expressed that dissatisfaction to me. Some of them consider they ought to get as much for their sheep as they do in the Canterbury District.

76. What competition is there in your district against yourselves in buying sheep?—There are the two Wellington companies, besides the Aramoho and Longburn. The Longburn company are not operating up to Wanganui regularly, but they have bought there, I believe.

77. North of Wanganui, I suppose, the Aramoho company and yourselves have the trade to yourselves?—No. The other companies have buyers up as far as Hawera, and then the Waitara people come in.

78. Have you any idea of the price given in the district north of Wanganui by the Wellington companies as compared with what they give in a district like Otaki?—That I could not say.

79. Are they a hot opposition to you in buying?—They are keen competitors.

80. Do you mind telling us what the price is that your company pay for, say, a line of wethers of between 70 lb. and 80 lb.?—We do not get lines averaging anything like that.

81. Well, what is the average weight you buy for freezing?—Our average would run out at about 56 lb. for freezing-weights. This last season has been an exceptionally good season, and it runs to about 58 lb. freezing-weight.

82. And do the two Wellington companies buy in the district north of Wanganui sheep of those weights?—I think they do. Whether they are more particular or not so particular as our company is I do not know.

83. In competing against the two Wellington companies are you aware that in your district they give the preference in purchasing to heavy-weight sheep as against sheep of an average of, say, 50 lb. to 60 lb. weight—or, say, between 60 lb. and 65 lb.?—I think that during two or three months of the year, when stock is very plentiful and the works are hardly able to cope with what is offered, a buyer of any of the companies might say to a farmer, "Well, we are very pushed just now and I ought not really to take any sheep from you; but if you are agreeable I will relieve you. If you have five hundred, I will take a couple of hundred and come back in a couple of weeks time." If he went in the ordinary way to pick these sheep from the farmer he would take all that were fit. My experience has been that they have done that.

84. If you were told that a witness stated yesterday that after picking the heavy-weight sheep the buyer never came back when the others were fit for market, what would you think?—I should think the buyer would never show up at that place again. The farmer would have the remedy in his own hands, and never deal with that man again.

85. But if there were only two companies in the district, and the farmer was shut up between those two buyers, he would hardly be in a position to do that?—My experience in my own particular district is that if one buyer does not go round the farmer never has any trouble in getting another man in. There is a feeling among the buyers that they should not trespass on any other man's ground. If you have been dealing with the Gear Company, say, and I have been dealing with the Wanganui Company, the Wanganui man would not care to come to you unless he was asked.

86. The companies do not poach on each other's preserves?—They do not tout against each other in that way. Although you have been dealing with the Gear Company for years, however, if you ask a Wanganui Company man to come in he would have no hesitation in doing so.

87. What proportion of fat sheep are sold in the yards in the Wanganui district?—My experience of sheep that have been put in as fat is very little. I think the main fault lies in not having them properly drafted. I have seen cases myself where there have been really good lines of sheep spoiled through containing a percentage of sheep that were not fit for freezing or shop purposes.