

94. Do you think Romneys are a good cross on a Leicester?—I do not know, but at the same time the Romney is a first-class mutton-sheep. I have frozen them perhaps more than any one else in New Zealand, because two of my clients were very large suppliers of Romneys, and I have six or seven thousand of them every year for the last fifteen years. They were splendidly bred sheep, and their wool has topped the market at 9d. and 9½d. There was a cry about them being yellow, but that is not the case. I am speaking of prime Romneys. Second-class Romneys, of course, are not so good.

95. Do you fatten sheep on artificial feed or grass?—Artificial feed mostly. Nelsons and ourselves do more ploughing than anybody else. There is no doubt they are better topped off on artificial feed.

96. Does your company make any manure?—We sell all our offal to somebody else. In Hawke's Bay there is scarcely any manure consumed. All of it has to go away, and it is a handicap to us.

97. But they want it at Wairoa: they would take it there, would they not?—No, the Wairoa country is not bad. The freight and charges kill it, and the brand. I used to make it, and I found our brand was discounted by from 15s. to 20s. a ton. The Canterbury farmers send their sheep to Islington and Belfast, and those people expect the farmers to buy their manure.

98. You said there was a difference in the value of Canterbury freezers?—Yes.

99. How is it that there is that difference in the price as compared with Wellington?—It is through the habit of selling lines of freezers.

100. Therefore the farmer suffers?—I do not think he does. Down in Canterbury they draft their sheep very carefully. They put them in the yards, where they are bought on their merits. Then there is another draft, for which the farmer would not get within two or three shillings of the first draft.

101. But ours are not bought on their merits—they are bought in a line. If there is not a ring there is an understanding between the companies; they will not go beyond their own price?—I do not know that that is the case. In November last we were giving in Hawke's Bay 13s. The meat went down to 2½d. a pound in December on the London market, and we were losing 6s. and 7s. a head at that time. We had to give a lower price, down to 10s., and there was a fearful outcry among the farmers about it. The sheep actually dropped 4s. in London between the time we started buying at 13s. and December.

102. You said that if you gave one farmer 6d. a head more for his sheep there would be an outcry on the part of the others; but there is no encouragement to farmers to breed good sheep if they cannot get more for them than for bad ones?—If we had good sheep coming forward in sufficient quantity to keep us going we should certainly give more, but we have to take the stuff as it comes.

103. But suppose you give a man 14s. for prime wethers and you give the next man only 12s., it would encourage the last man to improve his sheep. That would put us on one level?—But every sheep-farmer thinks his sheep are the best.

104. Is it not a fact that there is no good in a farmer trying to improve his sheep because he will get no more than the average price? There is no margin in your prices?—I would not say that, because if a man produces the better quality he would get his sheep away in larger drafts and benefit by the winter freights.

105. He might not be able to hold over his sheep, and they might go back?—You must bear in mind that, as far as possible, we pick them out according to the quality of the sheep. Supposing you produced a really good level line of sheep, our buyer would take the lot. Another man, whose sheep were not so good, might only get one-fourth of his taken. That is where the advantage is.

106. Would the buyer take the other sheep if they got fat?—If they are coming on he will.

107. Do you think the consumer could not be brought nearer in the Home market with the producer? Could we not send our meat out in carts and sell it ourselves?—No, the people at Home are far too strong for us to do that with success.

108. There is a ring at Home among the butchers?—I do not say there is a ring, but they have to make a living.

109. I am told that we cannot break down the butchers' ring; but if we concentrated our supplies and sent the meat out in carts, and sold it at the doors of the consumers, could we not break down the butchers?—I do not think so. They are a very big corporation, and if we attempted that they would simply discredit the meat amongst their customers.

110. That means a ring?—Not necessarily a ring, for if you sent your wool past the brokers it would be the same thing. I think the fairest thing would be to have a meat exchange and sell the meat in the same way as you sell the wool, and sell it by public auction if possible. That is just a rough suggestion I make, and I think nothing could be fairer. We do not hear the same complaints with regard to the way in which the wool is disposed of, and it is disposed of openly. We see the particulars of the different classes of wool and the prices obtained, and the meat might be sold in the same way.

111. *Mr. Flatman.*] When it comes to the question of wool, I think we have more to grumble about than we have with meat. There is more discrepancy in the profits made in wool than there is in meat, or a larger margin I should say?—I cannot say anything about that.

112. It looks so upon the face of it, when you get, say, 1s. 5d. a pound for wool and find it is worth 3s. a pound after it is spun. What is the fat worth as a by-product, as an average, on a 70 lb. sheep?—It depends. I have seen a 70 lb. sheep with almost no fat in it at all, while another sheep may be full of it.

113. Do you think it would give 7 lb. of fat?—Not a 70 lb. sheep.

114. Nothing near it?—I think, as a general thing, a Canterbury sheep would average 7 lb. of inside fat as against 3 lb. to 5 lb. in a North Island sheep.