

open out. If we had a few mobs in from well-known flocks I can tell how the rest will turn out pretty well during a season. The worst of it is that farmers do not draft out their sheep themselves. They simply put a whole mob into a pen and expect the buyer to pick out the weights he wants. I have known farmers to bring in a lot of sheep to be gone through; the buyers become accustomed to the small ones, and when they see another lot coming in that are bigger they find it a very difficult thing to draft them properly.

135. I understood you to say you fix a price for the sheep, and give the same price for all, your reason being that there would be an outcry among the farmers if you gave one man 6d. more. Is there not an outcry at the present time because you give the same price for inferior sheep as for the better class?—I have tried to explain that if a man has a really good mob of sheep the drafter will take the lot; but if he goes into an inferior mob he will perhaps only take a quarter of them. The first man will get his away earlier, and the second man does not get that advantage. If a man produces a good line of sheep I would make a deal quicker with him than with another man. It is a difficult matter to deal with. As I have said, the average farmer thinks his sheep are the very best, and it is very difficult to convince him to the contrary. I have asked men over and over again to come to our freezing-works and see the sheep killed, but they will not do so. I think it is a great pity that the farmers themselves will not take more interest in the matter. Dead stock and live stock are quite different things. I have known farmers who could not tell the difference between a ewe and a wether when they have seen them hanging up, and many cannot tell the difference between an old ewe and a maiden ewe. It is a difficult thing to tell what is a maiden ewe, but it can be done by butchers. I think the farmers in Canterbury take more interest in their sheep, for they know perfectly well that if they put a bad sheep into a pen at the yards that sheep will be marked.

136. *Mr. Field.*] Assuming that the farmers did the proper thing here, and that markets were established at such places as Levin, Masterton, and Wanganui, do you think the freezing companies would send down their representatives to buy for them?—If it would pay us to do it we would undoubtedly do it.

137. Would it not pay you to do it if the farmers did that?—Undoubtedly it would. I go down to Canterbury every year—I have relations there—and naturally take a keen interest in the market; and last year I took several men with me from Hawke's Bay to look at the pens. They said they did not see any difference between the sheep there and ours in Hawke's Bay. But I said, "You feel the sheep," and they did so. Well, it simply opened their eyes. Those sheep were as hard as nails, and there was no blubbery stuff about them. I saw Merinos there being sold at 18s., and of course such a thing is unheard-of up here.

138. *Mr. Haselden.*] Pure Merino wethers?—Yes.

139. Would you buy pure Merino wethers?—No; they are only used for butchers there. There is a great difference between the North Island and South Island climate, and it would be impossible to get Merinos into the same condition in our climate as they do down there, on account of the frosts and turnip feeding. Our sheep would get weak in the knees and suffer from footrot. I would like to mention one or two things that have been omitted in my evidence. In Canterbury there are more of the Border Leicester and Down crosses, and I believe they are the best. My butcher was one of the big buyers in Canterbury, and he is a thorough judge of sheep, and that is what he has pointed out to me. You cannot get a decent chop in Hawke's Bay. I mention this to show the difference in value of the carcass. When I go to Canterbury I order a chop for breakfast just as a treat, and this shows how much more profitable their sheep are than ours. You can make more out of each portion of the sheep. A great disadvantage with us is the falling-off of the sheep in winter. They lose their flesh, and when once they lose flesh they never recover it; they will get fat and blubbery. In Canterbury there is so much grain and root-crops grown, and you must know that there is a great deal of good in those stubble paddocks. We lose the advantage of winter feeding. Again, labour costs more in the North Island than in the South. We have to pay our butchers 6s. a week more in order to retain their services, or they would clear out, because they have only the six months' run. The men deserve more, and therefore they get it. Then, in reference to South Island buyers coming up and buying here: It must be borne in mind that if there is a good crop of turnips or stubble in Canterbury it pays them to come and buy our sheep to take down there, and often these big buyers of Canterbury have contracts to fulfil, and must buy even at a loss. But they are fair-weather birds and clear out again, while we have to take the sheep all round. If we make a good profit we raise the price. I have already stated that we only get from 20 to 25 per cent. of stuff equal to good Canterbury mutton. Another factor is the early maturity. We cannot get any two-tooth sheep to freeze—there is practically none in Hawke's Bay. They are the best, for the reason that none of the flesh has gone off them. They have been kept going as lambs, the fat is not so gross, and is not so tallowy. In Canterbury they are mostly two-tooth, I believe, while here they are mostly four-tooth and six-tooth, and the two-tooth is better meat and give better chops. Then, with regard to the charges: The more valuable the article the less the percentage of charges right throughout, and that has to be taken into account. Again, our rejects are very heavy as compared with Canterbury rejects.

140. *Mr. Field.*] Have you shipped to South Africa?—No. Of course, ours is such a small concern as compared with others.

141. I believe the Argentine people are offering very largely there?—Yes, and there is one thing I am very much afraid of. There is a very powerful company going to be started in the Argentine, and I am afraid there is going to be very heavy cutting there, because the companies that hold the reins there will not stand competition, and they are very wealthy. The Weddells Company are starting there with a capital of two millions, I believe, and there will be strong competition.