

so said the companies. Owners had therefore to be content with breeding for wool alone, and taking the best price they could get for their fat stock.

Certain sheep-breeders, however, who were in a large enough way, continued to breed superior freezing-sheep, and shipped on their own account with satisfactory results.

Crossbred wool fell in price, and sheep-breeders, especially in the bush country, turned to something that seemed more profitable. Taking a leaf out of Canterbury's book, they used Leicesters and Downs. But superior grades are not to be built up in either one or two seasons, and prices were not so satisfactory as those reported from southern markets. Some of the more enterprising sent some sheep there (and it is needless to say they would not have done so unless these were good sheep) and reaped a profit, causing greater dissatisfaction amongst those who had not. There are many factors, however, which I need not go into, and which are probably better known to others, which discounted these experiments.

The next point of advantage the South has is its climate. Except in Napier, which is usually dry, the North has a greater rainfall, and sheep do not fatten so well where there is much rain.

The system is not the same either. The southern breeder has, as I have pointed out, an inexhaustible supply of suitable ewes for breeding, although an enhanced price has to be paid for them. But as soon as he thinks they should go he fattens them off and buys others. Selling all his lambs, he lightens his winter stock, giving a better chance in the spring to the lambs with their mothers.

With all the disadvantages I have named, I am convinced that we in the North Island, with proper care, can turn out as good a sheep and lamb as those in the South, but we have much to learn. On bush farms year by year more winter feed is grown, and wonderful crops of rape and turnips result after stumping a piece of land. In the open land our system of farming is rapidly assimilating itself to that of our southern neighbours, and although we can probably never grow as heavy crops of turnips, yet we can grow enough.

The disadvantage of having no central market could be got over by companies paying so much per pound on certain grades. But there is no doubt that central yards would be preferable. I am aware that many people in the South sell to exporters on the ground. But they have always the safety-valve of the central market if they are not satisfied with the price offered. Here we have not that.

When I say that we can grow as good sheep as the Southerners, and fatten them as well, I have in my mind a neighbour who had 25 acres of rape and 25 of turnips, on which he turned off, I think, nearly eight hundred lambs and thirteen hundred wethers, averaging a little over 10s. for the lambs and 14s. for wethers. This may not be up to Canterbury prices, but are net values.

I may say I am not now a shareholder in any company (I regret that I sold my interest in one, as I think that farmers should hold the predominating power in all such companies). I can, therefore, speak from a disinterested point of view. Though some years I have gained by shipping lambs myself, yet this year I have lost by doing so, and, so far as I can remember, I would always have been a gainer by accepting the companies' price for wethers. This does not prove anything, because, shipping as I do in a casual and small way, my shipments would not have the advantage of those in a large way with a known brand and who are regular customers of agents in London. But I cannot say I have any complaint to make of the way the companies have done any business I have given them. Naturally, I should not be averse to get a better price if possible.

I am not, however, satisfied with the system, but that is very much in our own hands. A combination of shippers, I am satisfied, would do much to remedy this. I believe the companies are all quite willing and even desirous of freezing on owners' account. An association of shippers pooling their sheep—if they could be got together—would give owners a much better return than shipping alone. If owners agreed to form a company for a year, say, as an experiment, freeze their fats under contract, and ship under a special brand of their own, on the freezing company's grading, sell partially c.i.f. and sell the balance in London or the provinces through one agent, they could then see how the market would pan out for them. They could afford to send some one to report, and the agent, with the prospect of a good customer, would take especial care of the shipments. Prices would be regulated by the sales for the month for each of the grades. There still remains, however, those who would not join, and perhaps it would be more satisfactory to the owners if companies would give a price per pound for each grade. There are many difficulties in the way of carrying out the above, which I need not enumerate here; but these could be got over with experience.

A point I should like to mention also is Government grading. I am aware the companies do not favour this, and, as they have expert knowledge, one is diffident in offering an opinion. But I cannot help thinking that, as the result of experience in the butter trade, so in the meat trade the Government brand would have a good effect. If an indelible brand were put on the carcass that, as far as that locality was concerned—flax is so graded, viz., Wellington, fair quality; or Auckland, first quality—the carcass was prime, or first or second quality, it would be an advantage. An unprejudiced person whose position depended on his impartiality and accuracy, branding for quality only, notwithstanding the company's grade, would be an additional guarantee to the buyer. It would be sold as ——— Company's A, B, or C grade (Government), prime quality. In the butter trade there was friction at first; latterly, I understand, this is gone for the most part, and I am certain it has been an advantage. It is urged that mutton is different from butter, and one is forced to admit that it is so; but gradually the Government brand would become recognised by the buyer (always provided that it was properly conducted), and to the shipper it would be an advantage, for if his sheep were not classed prime by the Government Grader, he would try to make them so.