

take their sheep and where there would be greater facilities for selling—the fact of having markets like those would attract buyers from all parts of the colony, and thus give you level values?—It would be a difficulty to start. The business has drifted into the hands of the companies, and, unless they came forward to buy, I think it would be uphill work to establish a market.

32. If the farmers decline to take the ordinary steps of combination, or neglect to do so, do you not think it is a somewhat extraordinary course that they should make complaints to Parliament that they cannot get good prices?—It is not extraordinary when you know the circumstances well. A farmer, for example, has a lot of sheep, and it is a matter of very great importance to him to get rid of them, and if he is blocked with his sheep for a month or two it is a very serious matter. And he might be blocked while this market was being established.

33. Who would block him?—It would be in the power of the buyers of the companies to do that. I do not say they would do it, but I think it would be to their interest not to have the market. I think the company would rather go on buying privately as they have been doing. I have heard it stated that the holders of fat stock think the company would decline to come forward, and that there would be so few sold in the yards that it would be difficult to keep the market up.

34. Would it be of benefit to you if the State guaranteed 5 per cent. for a term of years to provide for refrigerating-works in your district?—I do not think it would be any advantage. I think, so far as the actual freezing goes, the farmers are very well served by the companies, particularly by the Meat-export Company, which is really a farmers' company. I do not think there would be any advantage in multiplying the number of freezing companies.

35. Would it be of advantage to the farmers if a number of them combined to freeze on their own account, as is done at the Belfast Freezing Company's works?—That would all depend upon circumstances, and it seems to me that the matter is in the hands of the companies. The question of rejected sheep is of such importance that we think no combination of farmers could commence the freezing business without taking that into consideration.

36. The farmer would not be able to get rid of his percentage of rejects?—There would be a great difficulty about that.

37. You do not admit that you are shut up to the present position, and the companies are to retain the mastery they hold, do you?—That is the position. As I have said, I think, in the matter of freezing, the present freezing companies do not do badly for the sheep-farmer. The real grievance I think the farmer has got is in reference to these markets—the matter of buying. I think that wants alteration, and that the purchases should be recorded by the buyers. They have been in the habit of privately buying store stock, which complicates the matter still more.

38. What do you suggest should be done with this record of stock that the companies have bought?—I think they should keep a record of all stock they buy, which should be available for public information or be open to the Press.

39. How would that help you?—It would throw daylight on the prices obtained. At the present time no one knows what they are giving. The custom at the present time is for the buyers to come round and place a price on the sheep, and you have to take that—that is, the price going at the time.

40. And you have no means of ascertaining as farmers whether you are getting a fair price or an unfair one?—No.

41. You are not able to estimate the value of a sheep on the London market, *plus* its by-products?—The best way to arrive at its value is to have a little healthy competition.

42. What do you suggest as the best means of obtaining that healthy competition?—One step in the right direction would be to have the prices recorded. This would be a record also for the southern buyers if they came up, so that they could see where the sheep had been bought before. They would then have no difficulty in finding out where to put their hands on sheep. Up to the present I know that they have had to go hunting about for them all over the country.

43. Has it been your experience that the advent of southern buyers has raised prices?—Yes.

44. How much?—It is difficult to say how much, because other things have to be taken into consideration. I have heard also that their custom is to pick out numbers of the best sheep and leave the second-class sheep to the companies.

45. *Sir W. R. Russell.*] Are you a shareholder in either of the meat companies?—Yes; in the Meat-export Company.

46. May we look upon you as an expert in the business?—No, not quite.

47. I suppose you are, like myself, a small sheep-farmer who takes what he can get?—Yes.

48. You said that we can breed as good sheep as they can in the South. Now, the natural corollary to that answer is, do we turn out as good sheep? That appears to me to govern the position very much?—Not quite. I think what we have been breeding is proof to me that we have made a mistake, and we are likely to profit by this mistake in the future. I have no doubt that there will be an improvement in the breed of sheep in the Wairarapa district. You have only to attend the ram-fairs to understand that.

49. As accounting for the difference in price, can you account for it in any way except with regard to the quality of the sheep?—A large proportion of the North Island sheep are distinctly inferior sheep—that is, those mentioned by Mr. Buchanan as Romneys and Lincolns.

50. You seemed rather in your evidence to point in a direction that would lead us to believe that the companies have been unfair in discriminating as to the value of the sheep. Supposing A had a flock of 65 lb. Lincolns, and B had a flock of 60 lb. Down sheep, would not the companies make a difference in the price paid for the Down sheep?—I think not.

51. Which would you take for choice?—I think I should be very foolish if I did not take the Down sheep.

52. Suppose there was a 60 lb. Lincoln and a 60 lb. Down sheep, would the buyer give any