

There were, he said, too many rabbits coming forward; there was an increase of 300,000 cases of Australian rabbits in 1906 as compared with 1905. The result was that prices had fallen: rabbits, skins and all, could be bought in the retail shops at 9d., 8d., and as low as 6d. each. His firm could dispose of 1,500 cases a week. The importer sells at cost-price and trusts to realising a profit by getting 1d. to 1½d. per skin. New Zealand rabbits are of a superior quality, but he could not get a higher price for them, so he was dropping them.

*Dairy-produce.*—The principal of one of the largest firms in the dairy-produce trade said that New Zealand cheese does not quite suit the taste of the northern people. It is good, well-made, honest cheese, and he is surprised that the people in the northern part of the kingdom do not take to it more kindly than they do. He thought London the best centre for the distribution of New Zealand cheese. As regards butter, it would be well if there were more direct shipments to Manchester; monthly intervals are too great. Therefore, until there is as regular and frequent a service of steamers from New Zealand to Manchester as there is to London, there is little use having butter shipped to Manchester direct. He expressed himself as very desirous of getting direct shipments of butter; but under present arrangements it pays better to get the goods through London and pay railway carriage on them. Until there was a more frequent and regular west-coast service he would not recommend any one to ship to these ports. It is all-right to ship cheese by the direct steamers to Manchester, because it is not so perishable as butter and not subject to the same market fluctuations; but its quality must be such as suits the public taste. New Zealand butter is growing tremendously in popularity in the north of England, and if there were a regular line of steamers he would encourage large shipments of butter to Manchester. It is the practice here to sell New Zealand butter to the retailers in the original boxes, as "New Zealand," and his firm encourages shopkeepers to mark it as such on the counters, which is in many cases done. In the south of England particularly a large quantity of New Zealand butter is used for blending purposes; but, despite the rumours flying about, he felt certain that the blended butters were not sold as "New Zealand," but are simply marked on the grocers' counters as "butter," at such-and-such a price. The practice of the blending consumes surplus New Zealand butter, and strengthens the price of the genuine article. He believed that the great bulk of New Zealand is sold to retailers in the original packages. Danish butter is mixed with margarine, and makes a very good mixture. The Danes do not object to this practice, because it clears their surplus butter at a high price, and strengthens the market generally. The blended material is sold as a mixture of the finest Danish butter and margarine. Quantities of Canadian dairy butter used to come to Manchester, but owing to the irregularity of the quality it was principally used for confectionery, and fetched a low price. When blending became fashionable, the blenders bought up these dairy butters and made a good article at a reasonable price. The result was that prices which were formerly 60s. to 70s. per hundredweight advanced to 85s. and 90s., simply because of the extra demand for the butter for blending purposes. As regards the New Zealand practice of adding salt and water to the butter, the north-of-England buyers would prefer about 2 per cent. of salt; but he would not allow the addition of water. What will be the effect of the new Butter Act passed by the Imperial Parliament? After the 1st January, 1908, 24 per cent. of water may be added to butter, and the product will be allowed to be sold, but not as butter—it must have a special name. How will this affect the butter trade? In his opinion it will increase the practice of blending, and will enhance the price of genuine butter, as the watered product will compete only with margarine.

The representative of another large firm said that the most of the New Zealand butter consumed in the Manchester district comes through London. The consumption is very large, and it would greatly increase if there were a better service of direct steamers. In the meantime, it is better to pay the carriage from London, because the steamers from New Zealand to that port are more rapid and regular. Canadian cheese is more popular here than New Zealand; but when Canadian is scarce or dear, New Zealand gets a chance. New Zealand cheese is, in his opinion, as good as any that is imported to Manchester, while New Zealand butter is a good deal better. The export of Canadian butter is falling off, as large quantities are being consumed in Canada, especially among the grain-farmers of the west. Last year some Canadian butter that was shipped to Manchester had to be sent back to Canada for consumption. His firm expected to get a good deal of butter on consignment during the coming season. He believed it would pay New Zealand producers better to send regularly on consignment, making an agreement for three or four years, at a fixed commission.

According to the head of a firm extensively engaged in the New Zealand produce trade, there had been for a long time a difficulty in getting goods landed from the steamers at Manchester. Another great drawback is that, whereas Bristol gets delivery of goods from the west-coast line almost as quickly as the other lines can deliver to London, it takes seven or eight days longer to get goods to Manchester. The market for New Zealand butter is always a falling one from the opening of the season, and in the circumstances it pays better to get the butter through London. What is wanted is a two-weekly west-coast service—the steamers alternately making their first call at Bristol and at Liverpool or Manchester. Fortnightly shipments are necessary for the proper distribution of butter to retailers. New Zealand butter is not selling so well lately, because its price has too nearly approximated that of Danish. A characteristic of New Zealand butter is that it is always too highly coloured. It would be well if, in preparing it, it were made whiter. New South Wales butter is paler, and it finds a readier sale on that account. His firm, he said, does one-fifth of the whole butter trade of Manchester, and handles one-third of all the butter exported from New Zealand. Four-fifths of the butter handled by his firm comes through London. If there were a two-weekly direct service of steamers the quantity of produce shipped to west-coast ports would be