

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

[NOTE.—*The evidence has not been corrected by the witnesses.*]

THURSDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER, 1908.

DAVID CUDDIE examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your full name?—David Cuddie.

2. And your occupation?—Dairy Commissioner.

Witness: Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I understand that the information you wish to obtain from me is something about the dairy industry in general, and as to how the question of milk-supply affects that industry. Of course, so far as our butter and cheese are concerned, we have reached a fairly high stage in regard to quality, but there has been very little improvement in that connection for some years now. The progress of the industry was very rapid for a time, but since then it has been very slow, until, as I say, we have reached a stage when there appears to be practically very little improvement indeed, if any. The dairy-farmers of New Zealand have certainly done exceedingly well in connection with the equipment and building of dairy factories both for cheese and butter, and think I can say we are practically second to none in that connection. The farmers have spent large sums of money in that way, and made a great deal of progress as regards the manufacture. The men engaged in the business as makers have also greatly improved their methods, and they are still improving. As a general rule, they are all anxious to turn out an article that will arrive on the Home market and sell for a good price, and give no rise to complaint whatever. Now, while that has been the case, we have made very little progress at all in connection with the farm end of the business. I admit that much has been done in some districts to improve the conditions under which milk has been produced, and I think I am right in saying that the majority of the dairy-farmers in New Zealand are doing their best to send in milk that is clean, and pure, and sound; but there are others, the minority, who are not so careful, and there is no doubt that the men who are looking after their milk are suffering on account of what may be called the careless people who will not take the care they should to deliver the milk in a sound and sweet condition. Now, that milk is sent forward to the factory. It is all mixed together, and the ultimate result depends a great deal upon the purity of the whole. One can of bad milk is quite equal to spoiling a whole vat of cheese or a whole churn of butter, provided it is taken in. And it sometimes works out in this way: that milk that has been handled carelessly does not show up until after the butter or cheese has been in store for some time, or shipped to the Home market. That came under my notice very clearly when I was in the Home-country, where I went to see something about the dairy industry and our dairy progress. While we sometimes hear little about the faults of milk at this end, my experience was that there are a good many faults in our butter and cheese, and it seems to be impossible to improve that unless we can make sure of getting milk in a thoroughly sound condition. Unless we can get the whole of the milk in a fairly sound condition we are not going to make any progress at all. So far as other countries are concerned in connection with milk-supply, some of them are ahead of us to some extent, but the conditions in these countries, of course, are different. Take, for instance, Denmark. There the people have been in the industry for many years, and the farms are occupied by the families of the farmers. They are handed down from one to another. Some do change hands, but not so much as in the case of New Zealand. Here we have a great many people who have been in the business for many years, but there are others who have had no experience whatever in connection with dairy matters. They have taken up land, and they never had any opportunity to acquire the necessary information to enable them to produce milk in the condition it should be produced. I believe in many cases that it is not through any want of honesty, but it is the want of knowledge, and in other cases—they may be few, but there are at least some, more in some districts than others, who have the knowledge, but will not take the care, and I think that if anything can be done to improve the quality of our produce, it will be money well spent, and will be returned to the farmers fourfold. I do not think I need say any more. So far as the regulations are concerned, I have not yet had an opportunity of going into them thoroughly since they have been in print, although I had something to do with the drafting of them, but I might just say that, as regulations go, I think they are satisfactory for general working. I might add that we have regulations under the Dairy Industry Act in connection with the manufacture of dairy-produce for export which we are working under, and some of them are very stringent, but we have had no difficulty whatever in working with the people in the industry. I might point out that for the last five years we have never even had a Court case. When we approach the farmers we find, by pointing out that it is to their advantage to do certain things, they generally agree. In fact, the position is this: that when any changes are to be made in connection with water-supply, or drainage, or dairy-factory buildings, we are sent for to advise them. And so far as the other branches of the industry are concerned, we have absolutely no trouble in connection with the regulations. They seem to work well, and I think I am right in saying that the result of the Department's work has been highly beneficial to our produce. It has been one of the means of placing our produce in the position it is in to-day, and if anything can be done to further improve that position, I feel it will be a great benefit to the people engaged in the industry, and to the country generally. What is wanted in connection with the dairy industry is a strong forward movement in order to place us at the top of the tree with regard to quality on the British markets, and I consider that, if the proposed regulations are given effect to, these results would be obtained in the near future.