

have been steady. I have been endeavouring to ascertain the probable future of the market for hemp, but have found it impossible to gather information that will justify any certainty in a forecast. Brokers differ very widely in their opinions. Manufacturers show no disposition to purchase freely. So far as I can decide, however, I have come to the conclusion that present prices are likely to continue for a time. I do not anticipate any rise or any great fall.

Wool.

The various series of wool-sales held during the past twelve months have proved of a satisfactory character, and prices realized for all qualities of wool sold at them must have proved remunerative to the growers in the Dominion. The chief feature has probably been the steadiness maintained in values throughout the period. Little fluctuation has taken place. For any slight alteration that may have been noted the demand from America has been the main cause. It has been recognized for some time that changes in the American tariff were pending, and so, in accordance with the opinion held by American buyers, a slight rise or fall, as the case might be, was occasioned in the values of the classes suitable for American requirements. Beyond this no change of any importance can be reported.

Early in the year it was recognized that the world's supply of wool would be moderate; that trade being sound and manufacturers busy would ensure a continued demand; and that stocks of wool in manufacturers' hands were not heavy, and fresh supplies would be required. All these factors pointed to a rise in values. The outbreak of hostilities in the Near East, however, had the effect of hindering the advance. Owing to the war, with the consequent interference of trade and tightening of the money-market by the imposition of high rates of interest on advances, Continental buying was greatly interfered with. As the result prices remained steady instead of advancing.

The outlook, like the result of the season's operations, is satisfactory. So far as can be ascertained, there is every prospect of the maintenance of, or advance in, the present good values, and the outlook for the wool-growers in the Dominion is decidedly encouraging.

Mutton.

During the year, in order to obtain accurate information for the purpose of the weekly produce cables, I have kept closely in touch with the markets for New Zealand meat and dairy-produce. The market for New Zealand mutton has been fairly uniform during the twelvemonth. For Canterbury, with the exception of one quotation, prices have ruled from 4½d. to 4½d. per pound, while for North Island brands quotations have been from 4½d. to 3½d. The average price for the year for Canterbury mutton has been 4½d. per pound, an increase of ½d. per pound on that of the previous twelvemonth. For North Island the average price has been 4½d. per pound, or ½d. per pound higher than the average for the previous year. These increases in prices will be noted with satisfaction by all concerned.

Lamb.

In the quotations for lamb there have been greater variations. As regards Canterbury, prices have been as high as 7½d. and as low as 5½d. The averages for the year have been 6d. and 5½d. respectively, both showing advances on the previous year's figures of 1d. and 1½d. per pound.

Beef.

The beef market has not been subject to any great sudden rise or fall. Prices for hind quarters have ranged from 3½d. to 4½d., and for fore quarters 2½d. to 4d., the average in each case being 3½d. and 3½d. respectively, an average increase over the previous year's results of ½d. and ½d. per pound.

During the year a good deal of correspondence has taken place with reference to the importation of frozen meat to the Continent. Unfortunately, however, little progress in this direction has been made.

Butter.

The prices obtained for butter during the twelvemonth have not been so satisfactory as during the previous period. Comparing New Zealand butter with Danish, the average price for the former has been 116s. 11d., as against 127s. 1d. for the latter, showing a margin in favour of Danish butter of 10s. 2d. for the year. As last year's figures were 120s. and 128s. 6d. respectively, it will be seen that the margin has been increased by 1s. 8d. per hundredweight, and that the average for New Zealand butter is 3s. 1d. lower than for the previous twelvemonth. This widening of the margin in price between Danish and New Zealand butter is regrettable. Opinions on the market differ very greatly as to the reason. While there may be a number of causes to which this is attributable, I am strongly of the opinion that the chief reason for it is the difference in methods adopted in handling and distributing the respective butters. Danish butter is placed on the market here systematically. The same brands go regularly on to the same markets. They are handled by the same agents year after year. These brands become known to retailers, who, as they can depend upon getting them, give their orders ahead. Going by this means into the hands of high-class retailers, to whom regularity of supply and dependence upon quality is of more consideration than a shilling or two per hundredweight in price, they generally meet a good market. New Zealand butter, on the other hand, cannot be depended upon to reach the same market two years running. Factory-outputs may be consigned one year and sold the next. Persons handling them have no certainty that if they work up a demand for any particular brand they will get it the following season. Consequently they take little