

During the year agreements in regard to meat-prices have been effected at Taumarunui, Wanganui, Christchurch, Taihape, and Oamaru.

The issue of permits to draw supplies from the Imperial hooks is now in the hands of the Live-stock Division of the Department of Agriculture, which acts in co-operation with the Board.

FISH.

During the period under review the Board has kept in close touch with the fishing industry at Dunedin, Port Chalmers, Napier, Wellington, and Auckland. The development of this important industry is greatly retarded owing to difficulties in connection with supplies of materials, due to war conditions. The enterprise shown at Auckland has resulted in that city being supplied with fish at prices which are considerably cheaper, generally speaking, than in any other part of the Dominion. The prices of fish in Auckland have increased of latter months, owing mainly to the increased cost of almost all the equipment used in connection with the trawling industry, and, in addition, to the increase granted in wages to the workers employed in the calling, and to the fact that one of the trawlers belonging to the municipal authorities is being used in defence work. In Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin prices have fluctuated considerably, owing mainly to the abnormal weather experienced affecting supplies, the withdrawal of the largest trawler employed in New Zealand waters for defence purposes, and, for a time, the fact that those fishermen using motor-boats were handicapped owing to shortage of petrol-supplies. In this last connection the Board was able to render material assistance by ensuring regular supplies to fishermen at a reasonable price. The Board would emphasize the fact that the provision of cheap fish to the consumers of New Zealand generally is dependent upon a large expenditure of capital for the purchase of suitable equipment, trawlers, and for the provision of cool storage and insulated transport; and during the war period it is hopeless to expect that the necessary capital to provide this equipment can be secured. Indeed, it is only by very strenuous endeavour that the supplies of wire rope, nets, &c., have been secured from abroad.

Several complaints were received by the Board regarding fish-prices in the South Island. It was alleged that in order to maintain high prices edible fish was frequently dumped overboard. On inquiry these allegations were found to be incorrect, as any fish fit for human consumption could readily be disposed of, and only such as had become useless for that purpose was destroyed, this being due to the fish being kept in exposed positions owing to lack of cool-storage accommodation.

With a view to assisting the industry the Board sought for information from abroad concerning nets known as "purse-seines." This net appears to be extensively used in Canada for catching both surface and deep-sea fish, and its introduction in New Zealand would undoubtedly be followed by increased supplies. Information concerning these nets was received from the Canadian Government, which showed that "purse-seines" were largely used in the Canadian fisheries, particularly on the Pacific Coast in connection with the salmon and herring fisheries. The net was reported to be an unusually capable fishing-engine for the capture of fish that school at or near the surface. Although the cost of such nets at the present time is abnormally high, information has been received that one of the leading fishing firms in New Zealand has already made arrangements to secure a complete net for use in our waters.

EGGS.

The Board was asked to institute an inquiry into this industry, and to make a full and complete report as to the desirability or otherwise of prohibiting the importation of Asiatic eggs. Inquiries were made by the Board in the four main centres, and thirty-nine witnesses were examined. The suggested restriction on the importation of Asiatic eggs appeared to the Board to be a matter of very considerable importance, first from its bearing on the poultry industry of New Zealand, and secondly from the possibility of the local supplies being insufficient for New Zealand's requirements if this source of supply were cut off. The inquiry, therefore, was of a comprehensive character. Of the thirty-nine witnesses examined, eighteen represented the egg-producers, two the management of egg circles, two the importers, and seventeen the bakers and pastrycooks. A full report was made to you on the 18th February last, in which it was shown that the main points in favour of prohibiting the importation of eggs as set out by the producers and the managers of the egg circles were—(1) The cheap selling-price of the imported article; (2) the effect that this cheap price has on the production of eggs in New Zealand; (3) the suggested danger to health by the importation of Asiatic eggs and pulp.

The bakers and pastrycooks were unanimous in asserting that without the importation of desiccated eggs and pulp the egg circles and producers in New Zealand were totally unable to supply the demand in the winter at any price whatever.

Taking the first two objections of the producers, the Board found that the price paid for the imported article was equal to about 1s. 4d. per dozen or a little higher, and that it was seldom, if ever, purchased or used by the bakers and pastrycooks at any time other than in the winter months, when eggs were always selling at 2s. and over per dozen in New Zealand, and that, therefore, as there was a full demand in the winter for eggs produced in New Zealand at a very remunerative price, the importation of eggs for baking purposes had no effect on the poultry industry during the winter.

It was admitted by the poultrymen that in the early summer months, when eggs were sold in large quantities at from 10d. to 1s. 3d. per dozen, the competition against the egg circles came not from importation, but from farmers and others who kept fowls as a side line; and it was stated by one of the producers that of the whole of the eggs used in New Zealand 80 per cent. was the product of the ordinary barn-door fowl.