

The Board has been very closely engaged in the investigation of the conditions of and methods for improving the trade, both in New Zealand and in London, and has already secured considerable reductions in the excessive charges which are bearing so hardly on producers.

Much yet remains to be done in obtaining reductions in the charges payable in respect of freight and other services.

The Vice-Chairman of the Board has been in London for some time, and it is anticipated that when his considered report is received a forward move will be possible in the directions authorized by the Act.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

The outstanding feature of the year has been the relatively low range of prices obtainable for wool, frozen meat, dairy-produce, tallow, hides, sheep-skins, and phormium-hemp. In the latter part of the year, however, and since its close, conditions for most classes of our produce have shown a gratifying improvement, and more or less normal business at fairly good prices has been possible, excepting in crossbred wool and hemp. The steady improvement in the wool-market which I felt justified in predicting some time ago has been fully realized, and if the upward movement continues, next season's clip should bring prices that will enable the producer of crossbred wool to secure something above the cost of production.

The total value of the agricultural products exported was £39,236,528, or 89 per cent. of the total value of all exports—namely, £43,794,883.

The number of sheep slaughtered decreased by about 600,000, but lambs killed increased by 1,400,000, making a net increase of 800,000 in sheep and lambs. The aggregate number therefore during the year constitutes a record.

The total number of cattle in the Dominion increased by 150,000 over the figures for the previous year, a satisfactory improvement being shown in the number of dairy cows and heifers.

The numbers of stock killed at meat-export slaughterhouses for the year 1921–22 were as under, the figures in brackets indicating the figures for the previous year: Cattle, 97,907 (194,089); calves, 9,585 (6,525); sheep, 3,071,255 (3,671,182); lambs, 4,876,555 (3,433,101); swine, 92,697 (66,395).

The 1921–22 season opened with export prices at an unprofitable level for all classes of stock; but fortunately these conditions suddenly improved for both mutton and lamb, the latter reaching a satisfactory figure even when compared with pre-war prices. Beef has remained at a price that does not encourage export, and the prospects do not indicate an immediate improvement.

The market for butter was decontrolled in the United Kingdom from the 1st April, 1921, and in New Zealand from the 1st September, 1921. The market conditions for both butter and cheese have been remarkably unstable throughout the season. Butter-prices, however, began to improve soon after the New Year, and at the end of March the market appeared more stable. The cheese-market did not promise relatively good returns, and many dairy factories which had changed over from butter to cheese about December reverted in March to the manufacture of butter.

The amount collected by the Department during the year in fees imposed for grading dairy-produce amounted to £12,863.

The fruit industry continues to make progress. The area in commercial orchards is estimated at 30,000 acres, the increased area planted throughout the Dominion during the last five years being 3,171 acres. The fruit-yield has been a good average one, the apple crop being estimated at one and a quarter million bushels.

The market returns for fruit of good quality have been satisfactory to the grower, and the export of fruit, which received a serious set-back owing to war conditions, again commenced. The bulk was consigned to the English market under the guarantee of a net return to the grower of 1d. per pound. The season's exports total 120,513 cases, which is nearly double the quantity exported in any previous year.