

North Island: do you think there is legitimate grounds of complaint on the part of sheep-breeders in the North Island that they are not getting fair prices from the local buyers?—So far as I am concerned, what I have bought they have got a fair price for. I give a trifle more than the companies do.

76. Did you, in order to be able to buy profitably, give more than the local companies were offering when you came to the North Island?—Not exactly. I picked the finest sheep. I bought a good quality of fine-woolled sheep, and they were better for me.

77. You were able to give more and make a profit?—I do not know whether we are going to make a profit yet. There was a loss last year.

78. *The Chairman.*] I believe you, along with others, have been at great pains to establish the brand known as "Prime Canterbury"?—Yes.

79. Are you aware that large quantities of Southland sheep are yearly railed up to Canterbury, frozen there, and branded there?—I have heard so, but I have never seen it. Still, at the same time, you might have as good sheep in the Southland portion of the island as we have in Canterbury. They have as good sheep as we have, excepting that they are not so valuable per head on account of the fat. They are as good so far as meat is concerned.

80. Do you think that the freezing of Southland sheep in Canterbury is lowering the standard quality of Canterbury sheep, and also lowering the price on the London market?—I would not say they are lowering the price on the London market, but I think they are lowering the tone of the Canterbury sheep.

81. And they are branded as Canterbury sheep?—I do not think they are. It would be a disadvantage if they were branded as "Prime Canterbury."

82. Are you aware that South Island buyers do give more for Wellington and Hawke's Bay sheep than the local buyers do: has that been your experience?—Yes, but they pick their sheep. It is a difficult thing to get a certain price for one article as you can for a number of articles. If I were to say, "Yes, they do," I should be saying something unfair. If a man takes a number of good, fair, and bad sheep, he cannot afford to give the same price. I want good stuff and am prepared to give a good price for it.

83. *Mr. Haselden.*] You say you picked the sheep?—Yes; I picked good-quality, fine-woolled sheep.

84. But would you not go back and take the rest of them?—I take the pick of the class of sheep for the wool and quality of mutton.

85. You will not take the whole of a farmer's sheep?—I would not take his big, coarse sheep for freezing.

86. You would not touch them?—No, I would not touch them for freezing.

JOSEPH D'ATH, Farmer, Otaki, examined. (No. 7.)

87. *The Chairman.*] You are aware of the purpose of this Committee—the intention. Would you care to make a statement to the Committee, or would you rather that you were asked questions?—I would rather answer questions.

88. *Mr. Lang.*] I would like to ask you about the system of buying in your district: you sell to the freezing companies?—Yes.

89. And the buyers come round to your farm?—Yes.

90. How do they arrange about that: do they pick out the best sheep, and not come back for the others?—They always take the biggest and best first, and leave the small ones.

91. And do they come again and take the next pick after awhile?—Yes. I notice that as soon as Mr. Hurse came to buy in the North Island, sheep went up 1s. 6d. a head. The companies began to pay 1s. 6d. a head more for our sheep, taking them the same as they had been taking them before, and the same sort of sheep.

92. You had no competition before?—One company gave the same price as the other company.

93. Have you not a local market?—No.

94. *Mr. Hornsby.*] Have you noticed in this morning's paper the price cabled out from London?—Yes.

95. Do you notice in the Agent-General's report from London that there is always given a price for the Wellington Meat-export Company's meat?—Yes.

96. Do you notice that in the Press Association's message from London there is no mention made of the Meat-export Company, but that the whole of the North Island meat is lumped together?—Yes.

97. And the price given by the Agent-General for North Island mutton is less than that for the Meat-export Company?—Yes.

98. Before the Agent-General sent out his prices, at the request of the Government, did you ever hear of any difference in the price between the Wellington Meat-export Company's meat and the North Island sheep?—I never heard of it until the Agent-General went Home and sent out weekly reports.

99. You never heard of any difference until then?—No.

100. Do you remember on one occasion Mr. Dilnot Sladden, manager for the Wellington Meat-export Company, published the price of his company's meat in London?—Yes.

101. And you never saw it after?—No.

102. That was the only occasion on which it was published?—That is the only occasion I saw it.

103. The difference between the price of North Island—that is, the Meat-export Company's meat (I am giving the Agent-General's information)—and the Canterbury meat is sometimes  $\frac{1}{2}$ d., sometimes  $\frac{1}{4}$ d., and sometimes less than  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. on the London market?—Yes.