

16. Do you see the meat yourself much at Home?—Yes.

17. What is your own observation; does it lead you to think that the meat is coarser or finer than it was before?—I was not in the Home market ten or twelve years ago, and I do not myself notice the great change referred to in the mutton since that time.

18. You do not think it has improved generally?—No.

19. Do you think it has fallen off?—My opinion as Produce Commissioner may not appear to you to carry as much weight as that of those handling the meat; but it is that generally New Zealand meat during the last six years has not depreciated very greatly.

20. I should think your opinion, as an absolutely impartial opinion, ought to be of value; but my local knowledge out here would lead me to say that more attention is now paid to the breed of meat than before, and therefore I am surprised to hear this?—I consider that North Island sheep have been improved, while those in the South have deteriorated.

21. You also say, "I believe it may pay the producer better to sell heavy weights at lower prices." I should think the weights were getting lower every year?—Yes, I believe your contention is correct.

22. *Mr. Buchanan.*] The average weight of over thirty thousand sheep the other day in the stores of the Wellington Meat Export Company was only 53·3 lb., and that weight would have been considerably heavier a few years ago?—Yes.

23. *The Chairman.*] I take it that the complaints made to you in regard to the falling-off or deterioration are not in your experience confirmed?—I do not go so far as those in the trade, who say that there is this great deterioration. I have explained my contention; that, while I think that North Island mutton has been improved, there is room for complaint to be made with regard to South Island mutton. I can speak from experience of Canterbury mutton, and I find now that there is not such a large proportion of prime-quality Canterbury mutton as I used to see when I was in business and handling it.

24. Do you mean to say the relative quantity of good quality is not kept up?—Yes.

25. What is the Christchurch Meat Company's prime brand; is it still "Eclipse"?—Yes, "Eclipse" is still the mark.

26. And the second quality—Is it not Christchurch Meat Company's?—Yes.

27. And the third quality "Crown"?—Yes.

28. The average value of Canterbury prime over North Island meat is 2½d. a stone more?—It has come down to 2d. a stone. They have approximated more closely.

29. There is really only a difference of 2d. a stone between North Island prime and Canterbury mutton?—Yes. If there is a scarcity of prime Canterbury the difference for that quality might go up 1d. per pound, but North Island meat has come nearer to Canterbury. Last year the average price for North Island mutton was rather over 3¾d. per pound, and the average price for Canterbury mutton was just under 4¼d. per pound.

30. There was only ¾d. per pound difference?—Yes, not quite ¾d. per pound.

31. Now, with regard to the question of grading for weights, do you approve of the weights fixed by the Christchurch people as to grading?—Yes; I think they grade very satisfactorily. They used to grade in 5 lb., but now they grade in 8 lb. standards.

32. Have you noticed the Belfast grading?—Yes, and, as far as I can see, it is more on the lines of average weight. They do not divide into so many classes.

33. Which system do you approve as being the better, the Christchurch or Belfast Company's?—I approve of dividing into grades as being more suitable to the needs of the purchasers.

34. Do you think it is detrimental for sales to slump a whole lot of sheep, say from 45 lbs. to 80 lbs., upon the market?—I think it is detrimental to any class of New Zealand produce if it is slumped all together. I believe in every line being graded into particular classes.

35. What do you advocate in the absence of the companies grading into suitable weights? Would you advocate regulation by Government for weights and for quality?—I advocate grading by Government merely for quality.

36. You would let sheep of from 45 lb. to 80 lb. go in as one class?—Yes, if the quality be equal. I believe in the Government grading meat into first quality, second quality, and third quality. The companies could then, as they do now, attach their tags to the carcasses, making their subdivision marks.

37. Does not that appear to be contrary to what you said just now, that slumping sheep was a drawback?—The companies can grade as they do at present, the Government merely guaranteeing by grading the quality of the meat. What I say distinctly is this; I am in favour of the Government grading and branding the mutton into first, second, and third quality. At present the sheep going into the freezing-works are first, second, and third quality, but there is no distinction made other than that the companies make. If the Government divided the sheep into first, second, and third quality mutton the companies would still be able to put their tags on, as is done at present, and subdivide them to suit themselves and the requirements of the market. The Government would merely guarantee the quality of the meat. I will give you an illustration of what I mean: At present the meat goes Home to the English market with tags attached. When it reaches the retail butcher he takes the tags off, and then there is nothing whatever to distinguish the meat as being of any particular quality. The third-class mutton can be sold by the butchers as of first-class quality. Under Government grading the meat would be retailed according to quality. The value of the better class would not be depreciated.

38. Do you think the Government can grade truer than the experts employed by the freezing companies?—Certainly not. The Government would have to employ experts as the freezing companies do.

39. The question was whether they could do it truer?—I do not say they could, but I think they would do it as well.