

At that time it was rather a burden to us, and therefore we would not have been unwilling to get rid of it. The private company were willing to take it over provided we could guarantee that it could be extended from Greatford to Levin, but when we applied to the Government they refused to grant us permission to do so. In 1902 our desire was to extend it to Greatford, so that we could get the advantage of the northern market. We were excluded very largely from that market because of the expense of carting to the Main Trunk line, and the expense of taking it round via Himatangi, an additional sixty miles, to bring it to Greatford.

18. I would like you to enlarge upon the character of the northern market, and tell the Commission whether or not it is of recent development?—The northern market is entirely of recent development. Before the Main Trunk line was opened there was nothing but a few sheep round Karioi. The whole of the southern portion of the land had been completely exhausted of timber. When I came here in 1873 you could see timber everywhere, but it is now all gone. I do not think there is a single mill south of Utiku. When the Main Trunk line was opened up it altered the whole system of farming in the Marton district. Hitherto they grew a small quantity of wheat for their own use, also oats and turnips. The central timber-market was so extensive, and there were so many horses and bullocks being used where in winter there was very little feed, that they perforce had recourse to our neighbourhood for all the chaff feed they could get. They took threshed grass-seed hay also, which is the cheapest form they could get it in, and the nearest place they could get it from was Marton. They have to feed the bullocks in winter and horses all the year round. The consequence is, of course, that there is an immense quantity of chaff going from that neighbourhood. Chaff as a product is peculiar. We have ceased to grow oats in the Marton district simply because we cannot grow them of the same quality as the southern people, nor can we grow them as cheaply. One of the reasons is that we can only grow Algerian oats, on account of the rust. It makes an excellent chaff, but is not such a good colour as white oats. One farmer in the district sold the whole of his chaff and bought oats for the purpose of feeding his horses in winter. The wheat, however, in the Marton district is growing much better than it used to. The farmers are beginning to understand that land requires assistance by way of manure. They are growing more wheat, and getting better crops. They find that the sending of grain or chaff to Wellington is too expensive, so the chaff all goes up to the north. We cannot compete in Wellington with chaff, for the reason that we can only grow Algerian oats, whereas in Blenheim they can grow white oats, which makes a much brighter chaff than we can grow. The Wellington people will not look at our chaff as compared with the Blenheim chaff. Although the southern people can compete in oats they cannot compete in chaff, on account of the cost of carriage. Chaff at £3 10s. will not bear very much carriage, and if it costs £1 per ton to bring it to Wellington, and so much more to bring it to Marton or farther up to the bush, you can see that the margin becomes a very small one. That is the reason why the whole of the farming in that neighbourhood has completely changed in character.

19. So far you have been speaking of the district of which Marton is the centre?—Yes.

20. Does the district which is served by this tramway participate in that chaff trade, and, if not, why not?—No, it does not participate in that trade, and cannot do so on account of the carriage. The Chairman remarked that he could not understand why motor-wagons could not be utilized in the carriage of chaff. As a matter of fact, it would be extremely dangerous to take chaff or straw on motor-wagons. It might very easily be burnt. Motor-wagons have not been a great success in our district: the expense is so great. We have to pay such a high rate for our petrol: it costs us 2s. a gallon; and the wear-and-tear on a motor-wagon is so great that until we can reduce the initial cost I do not think they will be a success.

21. *The Chairman.*] How near must the railway come before it pays you to grow chaff?—I could answer that question in one sense by saying that I once sold a piece of land three or four miles from Feilding. The man who bought the land lived about eight miles from Feilding, and he said he could afford to pay £1 an acre more for the land because he could take two loads a day from the point where my land was situated to Feilding, whereas he could only take one from the other.

22. What distance do you say a farmer would have to be from a railway to be able to grow oaten chaff and make it pay?—I can only say that the farthest I know of any chaff being grown near Marton and carted to the Marton Station is, at the most, about five miles.

23. *Mr. Skerrett.*] What is the practical experience of farmers in the Sandon district in regard to competing with their neighbours in the matter of chaff, taking into consideration the necessity for cartage and handling?—The nearest Sandon farm to the Greatford or Feilding Station is about nine or ten miles. The land on the Feilding side is rather broken for the purpose of cropping, though it is very good grazing and turnip land. The Sandon people do not have the northern market, and there is no encouragement for them to participate in it, because the expense of carting is considerable.

24. Are you able to assure the Commission that the experience of farmers in the Sandon district is that the cost of handling and cartage to Marton precludes their profitably dealing in oaten chaff?—I can only say that the farmers do not do it, and that they could do it if there was the required extension. There is a considerable amount of chaff grown on the northernmost edge of the Manawatu County. We reckon that the land round there is already served by the present railway. It is south of Halcombe that the chaff is grown. The farmer will naturally go into the most profitable line he can get, and if it was more profitable to grow chaff by reason of the extension of the tram enabling him to get a market he would do so.

25. The farmers round Marton find it profitable to grow chaff?—They practically make a living by growing and selling it.

26. What do you say with reference to the growing of grass-seed in the Sandon district?—This trade has developed within the last decade.